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PlayStation®

The Official Magazine

Issue 054 January 2012

PlayStation - The Official Magazine Issue 54 (January 2012)

WAR!
MW3 vs. BF3
Showdown

PlayStation's
New Year's
resolutions

BIOSHOCK INFINITE
DmC: DEVIL MAY CRY
TWISTED METAL
MAX PAYNE 3
BORDERLANDS 2
TOMB RAIDER
MASS EFFECT
THE LAST GUARDIAN
N7

2012's
HUGEST GAMES

22-page blowout on the
next wave of great games

PS VITA
Blasts off
in Japan

+

REVIEWED
- Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim
- Assassin's Creed: Revelations
- Need for Speed: The Run
- WWE '12 | And more!

Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

TEEN
T
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Mild Suggestive Themes
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Violence

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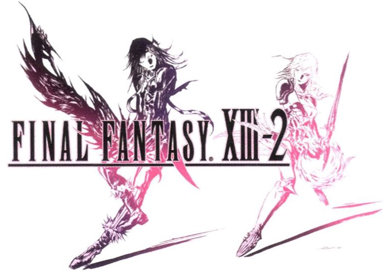
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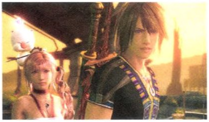

SQUARE ENIX

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The Official Magazine

JANUARY 2012

COVER FEATURE

36 **HUGEST GAMES OF 2012**
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WAR!
2012's
HUGEST GAMES
22-page blowout on the next wave of great games
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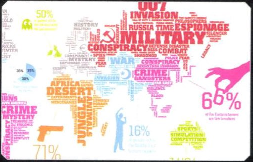

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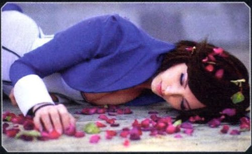

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Halfway there

Looking back on five years of PS3, and looking forward

The start of a new year always inspires people to look forward. Perhaps that's why rumors of a 2012 announce for the next Xbox system are rampant, which in turn causes speculation that a PS4 announce will also arrive in the coming months. But while the prospect of news on the next-gen consoles is exciting, I'd be very surprised if an official PS4 announce arrived before E3 in June, with this fall's Tokyo Game Show being the far more likely prospect.

The reasons? 1) The PS Vita launch—Sony would be mad to step on the release of its magnificent new portable with attention-diverting PS4 info. 2) It more closely mirrors PS3's emergence during PS2's decade-plus lifespan, and 3) PS3 has just celebrated its fifth anniversary—just one-half its lifecycle! Frankly, there's still a whole lotta great gaming left in the ol' girl.

Just look at what year five brought for PS2: *Resident Evil 4*, *Shadow of the Colossus*, *Kingdom Hearts II*, *Final Fantasy XII*, and *Okami* to name some favorites. The mid-cycle years are the sweet spot for games as developers finally have the knowledge and experience to tap into a console's full potential.

Our cover feature this issue takes a look at the games we predict will be the best of this potential bumper crop. We've been rabidly anticipating *BioShock Infinite* for months and the *Grand Theft Auto V* announce has us all hot and bothered, but it's the less obvious titles—newcomers like *Lollipop Chainsaw*—that really have us intrigued.

But as extensive as our feature may be, there are other amazing PS3 games in the works that the game companies just weren't ready to divulge info on. So feel free to obsess about PS4 info, but just remember that 2012 will likely be PS3's best year yet.

Roger Burchill
Editor in Chief
twitter.com/RogerPTOM

Ken Bousquet
Art Director
twitter.com/ArtKenPTOM

Tall, serious, and almost certainly magical, Ken Bousquet could best be described as a Dunmer dark elf. His weapon of choice? *Art*. Well, art and the fires of his ancestors.

Scott Butterworth
Associate Editor
twitter.com/ScottPTOM

What else could Scott Butterworth be besides an Imperial? Regal, handsome, and totally in charge of writing bios this month, his natural charm would fit no where else.

Ryan Taljonick
Assistant Editor
twitter.com/RyanTaljonick

As a pale, blond-haired man from the heart of icy Michigan, Ryan Taljonick would undoubtedly be a Nord. They do have a natural 50 percent frost resistance, after all.

Anne Lewis
Editorial Intern
twitter.com/BDRAnneLewis

If ever Anne Lewis were a mythical race of some sort, she'd be a Khajiit (cat people, for the uninitiated) since she loves kitties almost as much as she loves clawing people's eyes out.

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Inside Qore Episode 44

Junkyard Dog: Off the Chain

This vehicular-combat reboot, simply titled *Twisted Metal*, adds everything its developers have always wanted. We smash through the updates, including a 16-player online mode with 7 game types and a whole new scale of destruction. If you'd rather game in traffic jams (versus creating them in games), the PlayStation Vita has it all: a touchscreen, a back touchpad, two cameras, motion-sensitivity, and more. We go hands-on and can't get enough of those dual-analog sticks either. EA's sky-dancing snowboarder returns in *SSX*, and we get back on the mountain. And we visit Big Huge Games for *Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning*, the RPG being developed by some big-huge talent.

JESSE BLAZE SNIDER HOST OF QORE

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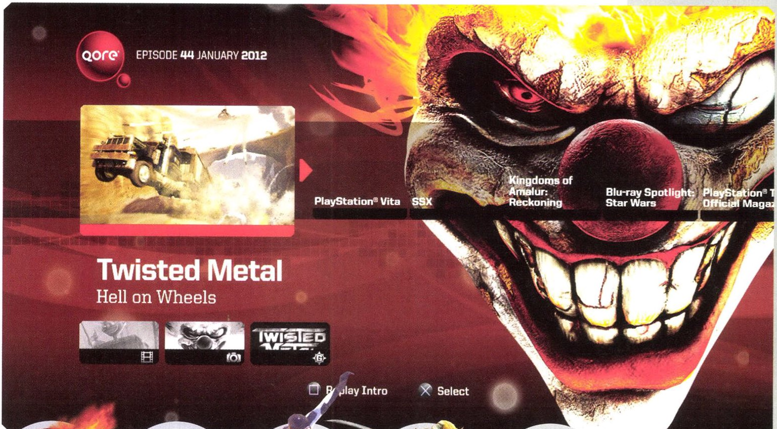
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EPISODE 44 JANUARY 2012
PlayStation® Vita
SSX
Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning
Blu-ray Spotlight: Star Wars
PlayStation® T
Official Magaz
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Hell on Wheels
TWISTED METAL
☐ Replay Intro
✕ Select

Twisted Metal
Life in the fast lane.

PlayStation Vita
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SSX
Coming down the mountain.

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning
This is how we role.

Blu-ray Spotlight
Star Wars! Nothing but *Star Wars!*

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Fill up your life with our monthly guide

MONDAY **TUESDAY** **WEDNESDAY** **THURSDAY** **FRIDAY** **SATURDAY** **SUNDAY**

JAN. 03

Sleep It Off
Today is Humiliation Day and we intend to ignore this awful holiday by focusing on another one: Festival of Sleep Day. G'night everyone.

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NFL Blitz (PSN)

05

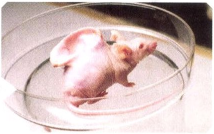
Birth of Bradley
This one is for the ladies out there (all 10 of you). We guess it goes out to the birthday boy, too. Today we raise our glasses to *The Hangover's* Bradley Cooper.

06

Exorcise the Demon
The Devil Inside releases in theaters today. If there's one thing we find creepier than exorcisms, it's people who twist up all weird. Gross.

09

Playing God
Today is Play God Day and we decided to genetically engineer people and animals to celebrate. Apparently, this is illegal. Who knew?



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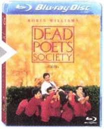
Friday the 13th
We don't recommend planning any trips to old summer camps today, because it's January, so it's still pretty chilly. Oh, and Jason is out there somewhere.

16

Martin Luther King Day
We remember and salute Dr. King and the struggle for civil rights as we prepare to spend our day off playing more games.

17

O Captain! My Captain!
Our bosses won't be particularly pleased when we all stand on our desks reciting poetry after watching *Dead Poets Society* on Blu-ray.



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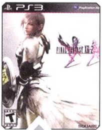
Beating the Undead Horse
The *Underworld* series releases its fourth installment, *Underworld Awakening*, today. We're pretty sure this undead series will never die.



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And the Emmy goes to...
The first Emmy Awards were given out this day in 1949. Now if only we could nab one for PTOM Theater...

28

A day of mourning
26 years ago today, the brave men and women on board the space shuttle Challenger lost their lives when the shuttle exploded shortly after liftoff.

29

The Raven
Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" first published this day in 1845. Once upon a midnight dreary, while we pondered, weak and weary, something something videogames.

30

A Commander's Birthday
The powerful voice of FemShep, Jennifer Hale, celebrates her birthday today. We fear and respect her far too much to even make a joke. Happy birthday, Jennifer!

31

Final Fantasy XIII-2
Step back into the beautiful world of *Final Fantasy XIII* with the release of its direct sequel.

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

Vita Launch
We look at Japan's Vita launch list. Which games will make it here?
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Banner Year
We reflect on 2011's impact on the PlayStation family.
▸▸Page 16

Crossing the Line
After more than a year of silence, Spec Ops: The Line resurfaces.
▸▸Page 19

Ground War
CCP Games shares plans for a FPS integrated with EVE Online.
▸▸Page 20

The Great Debate
Can Crytek save Homefront? PTOM editors weigh in.
▸▸Page 22

1

Combat comes home

Ubisoft sets the stage for Rainbow 6: Patriots

With its focus on brief, tense firefights and tactical strategy, the *Rainbow Six* series has always managed to scratch an itch that most shooters choose to ignore. But after three years of no Team Rainbow, well, let's just say we could really use some virtual Calamine lotion. So naturally, we're ecstatic Ubisoft is hard at work on *Rainbow 6: Patriots*, which is slated for a 2013 release—and after checking out the announcement trailer and chatting with the devs, 2013 can't come soon enough.

Rainbow has seen a bit of a transformation since the Sin City shootouts of the *Vegas* games. We play as an operative under the command of James Wolfe—a Rainbow veteran who's willing to take ethical shortcuts to combat a new terrorist uprising within the United States. "Terrorism is not about taking hostages and hijacking airplanes anymore," says creative director David Sears. "Terrorism—the *new* terrorism—is all about sending a message: 'We just don't like you.' There's no warning, there's no hostage situation, there's no demands. Right now there is a tremendous amount of political energy in the United States. It lacks a channel for expression. Americans are very distressed. Domestic terrorism is the greatest threat we face."

Domestic terrorism indeed—our foes here are the True Patriots, a terrorist cell composed of political radicals and disenfranchised Americans. A charismatic man by the name of Tredway controls the organization and aims to galvanize a revolution to overthrow the U.S. government. It's all pretty dark when we think about just how close to home *Patriots* really hits; it draws some very obvious parallels to the current state of our world, touching on America's plummeting economy and civil unrest.

This, according to Sears, serves to humanize the enemy. "How can terrorism be powerfully felt by the player if every character that you shoot and kill seems pretty flat or one dimensional?" he asks. To ensure we have a better understanding of the people whose lives we're going to end, we'll be playing from the perspective of multiple characters throughout the game, including members of the True Patriots and civilians caught in the cross fire. It's a lot more difficult to pull the trigger on a man when we've just learned he joined the terrorists because they were holding his family hostage. It's pretty powerful stuff.

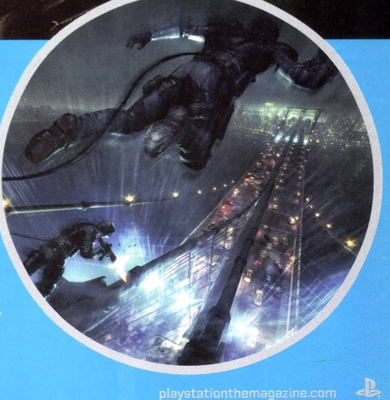
Of course, the real substance of the game is found in its tactical strategy. As opposed to the snake cam in *Vegas*, we now have access to an augmented reality mechanic that lets us see through walls to more effectively plan our attacks. Controlling our squad's movement is a breeze thanks to a one-button command interface, and marking targets for execution or distraction is equally simple. *Patriots* plays like an enhanced *Vegas*; there are a variety of new

> “Terrorism—the *new* terrorism—is all about sending a message: ‘We just don’t like you.’”
>
> *—Creative director David Sears*

door-breaching and room-clearing methods, including stealth infiltration and the ability to literally kick down doors (an effective tool for taking out any unsuspecting terrorists standing on the other side). Teamwork is as important as ever, and improved squad accessibility means we're always in complete control.

We closed out our demo with a brief look at *Patriot's* multiplayer offering. Fans of the granular map strategizing in the early *Rainbow Six* titles will be pleased with the inclusion of a similar 3D map layout, known as the Sand Table. Here, gamers can draft a plan of attack prior to a multiplayer match by placing waypoints and markers to highlight points of interest, including potential sniping perches and designated regrouping spots. These markers remain in place once a match begins, visible only to the team that set them. We don't know what kind of multiplayer modes we'll be seeing, or how big a role the Sand Table will play in the success of competitive games—but it's certainly an intriguing approach to online play.

Patriots has quickly become our most anticipated shooter thanks to its marriage of tactical strategy and high-stakes firefights. Considering it's still more than a year away from launch, we're pretty impressed with what we've already seen.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

2 Playing with Death

We take a look at five new additions to Darksiders II

When it comes to debut appearances, few developers have made as strong of a first impression as Vigil Games, whose freshman offering was the 2010 hack-'n'-slash adventure *Darksiders*. And while we loved slicing and dicing our way through hordes of bad guys as War, one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, we're eager to get a taste of *Darksiders II* in 2012. To satiate our desire for destruction, we've compiled a list of our five most anticipated changes for Vigil Game's sophomore entry.

War, meet Death

This time around we'll be playing as the Horseman Death. See, in the first game War is framed for initiating Earth's apocalypse before its appointed time. Now, only Death can clear his name—and he'll do it by killing his way to the bottom of the conspiracy. Where War was all about slow, powerful attacks, Death is all about agility. He dual wields two blades, which fuse together to form his iconic scythe during powerful combos. He also has access to a "Ghost Hook," a grappling hook used to pull enemies in range of his deadly attacks. Death's most impressive skill, however, is the ability to morph into his Reaper form—a powerful, towering angel of destruction. He's fast, he's acrobatic, and we can't wait to eviscerate legions of demons, angels, and, perhaps, the Charred Council itself.

From action to action RPG

While *Darksiders II* retains the original game's exciting, fast-paced combat, it also adds a layer of RPG mechanics to the series. Death has access to complex skill trees in which we can allocate points to evolve his fighting techniques and make him even more powerful on the battlefield. We imagine we'll be able to purchase new combos and abilities, as well as increase his efficiency with secondary weapons. The game even implements floating combat text (think *Borderlands*) so we can visually see his gradual increase in power.

Where's the loot?

Darksiders was full of hidden chests and collectibles, but *Darksiders II* adds a fully functional loot system. Enemies will often drop equipment when killed, allowing us to fully customize Death's armament. Every piece of armor appears on Death's character when equipped, and most are coupled with stat-increasing bonuses to further strengthen his attributes. Of course, every bit of equipment is designed to make Death look like a badass, and we can even pick up secondary weapons—like a giant, crushing hammer—to compliment our deadly scythe blades.

All around the world

Taking place in the Abyssal Plane as opposed to a smoldering, war-torn Earth, *Darksiders II* offers a myriad of vastly distinct environments and is roughly four times larger than *Darksiders*. From the lush greens of a mysterious forest to the gray, gritty kingdom of the undead, we can't wait to explore this (mostly) colorful new world.

Quest-bound

Of course, being as large as it is, *Darksiders II* would feel rather empty without some kind of population. That's why Vigil Games has filled it with multiple hub areas and a variety of NPCs, including quest givers and merchants. We can sell off old equipment, buy new items, and even embark on optional side-missions for extra rewards as we journey to clear War's name once and for all.

3 Vita is go in Japan

But which first-wave games will be coming to the U.S.?

The PlayStation Vita's long-awaited Japanese debut arrived the week before Christmas with a sparkling line-up of 26 launch titles. We take a look closer look at some of the launch releases to determine which games will make their way stateside for Vita's February 22 U.S. launch. Time to bust out those holiday gift cards...

▸ Uncharted: Golden Abyss

Say hello to Vita's flagship. Returning to the series' tropical origins, it features two new fortune-hunting sidekicks, too.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

F1 2011

We awarded the PS3 version a solid 8/10 and if this squeezes in all the cars and modes of its big brother, it's a winner.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Dream C Club Zero Portable

A host sim. Whose aim is a "happy ending." Excuse us, we need a shower.
Coming to the U.S.? No

Blazblue Continuum Shift Extend

The hardcore 2D scrapper's Vita version includes all of the original DLC characters.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Katamari Damacy

The loveable ball-rolling sim has all the addictive charm of the PS3 games. The colors look glorious on Vita's screen.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Hot Shots Golf Next

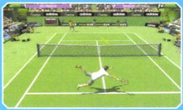
A cutesy golf game with clever touchscreen controls. We can pan around courses, and the screen flips if the Vita's held vertically.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Ridge Racer

The Vita version of Namco's beloved racer series will support touchpad steering and online racing.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Disgaea 3: Return

The certifiably crackers strategy series makes its Vita debut with two new characters and beefed-up animations.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes



Virtua Tennis 4: World Tour Edition

Looks nearly as purdy as its PS3 brethren, and also supports touchscreen controls.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Army Corps of Hell

Weirdly, this quasi-RTS bears a striking resemblance to Nintendo's *Pikmin*. Just replace flower-men with stabby demons.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Little Deviants

A mini-game compilation wherein we save a bunch of adorable alien things using the Vita's touchscreen, gyroscope, and mic.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Project N.O.E.L.S (working title)

Sounds mysterious—like a government E.T.-torturing lab, no? It's actually a music editor full of scantily clad girls and synths.
Coming to the U.S.? Doubtful

Monster Radar

Described as a location-based game, its only website is completely in Japanese and features two stickmen. Um, right.
Coming to the U.S.? No

Shinobido 2: Tales of the Ninja

Players control ninja Zen through graceful wall-running and balletic combat.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Lord of Apocalypse

Based on a card-game franchi...wait, come back! Honestly, this action RPG's real-time battles look distinctly promising.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

Dynasty Warriors Next

Yes, it involves knocking the feudal stuffing out of hundreds of identical soldiers, but the footage we've seen looks gorgeous.
Coming to the U.S.? Maybe

Dark Quest

An overhead action-RPG with four-player co-op. It's a port of the Gameloft series that's done the rounds on iOS and tablets.
Coming to the U.S.? Yes

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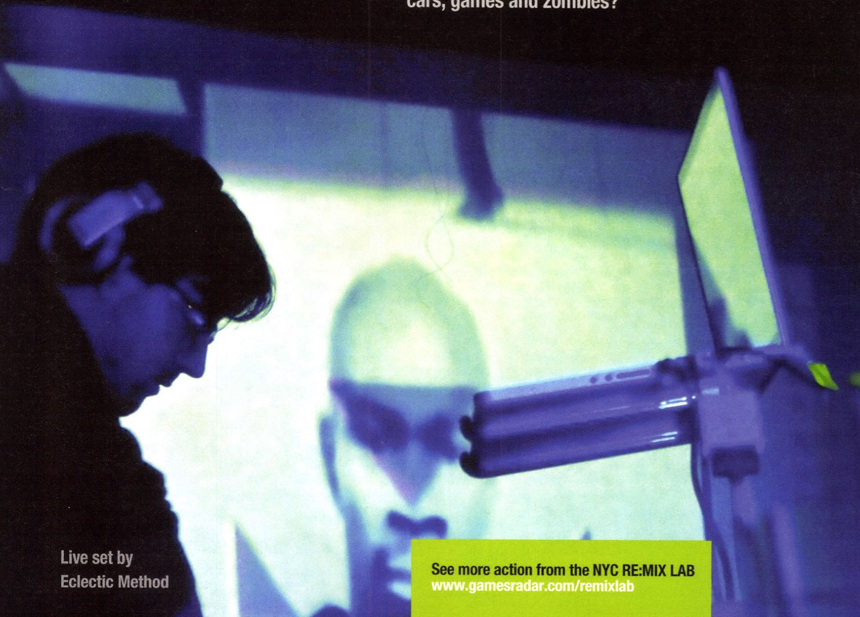
THE HYUNDAI VELOSTER RE:MIX LAB IS A MULTI-CITY FESTIVAL OF ART, MUSIC, FASHION, TECHNOLOGY, CULTURE AND DESIGN

New Yorkers have seen it all, but load up three custom Hyundai Velosters with a full DJ setup, an Xbox 360 and a 3D TV and even they have to take notice. And what better way to celebrate the spirit of the remix than by blending music, cars, games and zombies?



Live set by Eclectic Method

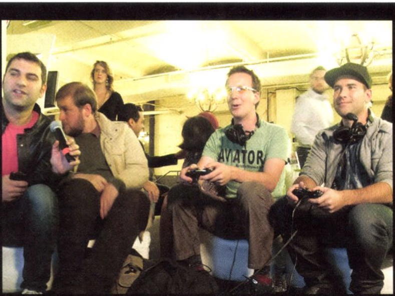
See more action from the NYC RE:MIX LAB
www.gamesradar.com/remixlab

GAMES

FORZA 4 PRO GAMER FACE OFF

Microsoft and Turn 10 did all the work bringing Forza Motorsport 4 to life, but pro gamers @EricAkaAviator and @SandyRavage get to have all the fun. No fair!

www.forzasport.net



XBOX
PC GAMER
PlayStation
HYUNDAI
Future
RE:MIX
WALK
PC GAMER

ZOMBIES

THE WALKING DEAD PANEL

Chris Hardwick, host of the hugely successful Nerdist podcast, chats with Walking Dead creator Robert Kirkman about the comic and Season 2 of AMC's undead smash hit.

www.amctv.com/shows/the-walking-dead

MUSIC

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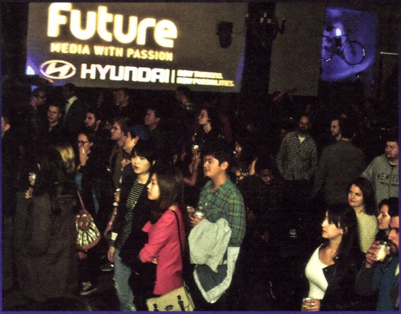
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The Big 10
Stories everyone's talking about

4 Reflections 2011

A look back at the ups and downs of the past PlayStation year

May

Pretty face
May started with a homicidal bang, as we gave Rockstar's sleuthing masterpiece *L.A. Noire* a shining 9/10. Combining groundbreaking facial animation with fetching fedoras, it perfectly captured the atmosphere of '40s detective films.

Footie fever
We're exposed to a near-fatal dollop of virtual soccer as we got our first peek at *FIFA 12*. A radical overhaul of its high-scoring predecessor—including new precision dribbling and manual tackling—it looked set to turn EA's sim into a Champions League winner.

Jun

Vita life
Ah, what a grand day for the mobile gaming fan. At E3, the artist formerly known as NGP was christened PS Vita. We also got our first look at exciting, supremely polished fare such as *Uncharted: Golden Abyss* and *Resistance: Burning Skies*.

Aussie rules
Team Bondi might have created one of the year's best games in *L.A. Noire*, but not without a price. In June, emails leaked over the long hours and unfair conditions the team had to endure to complete Cole Phelps' adventure. The studio later closed its doors for good.

Electric mist
The traditional summer lull was given a short, sharp 50,000-volt awakening to the face with the release of *inFamous 2*. Cole MacGrath's New Orleans-inspired adventure did parkour and bashing men with an electric pole to such effect that we awarded it 9/10.

Eye Sly
One of E3's most exciting announcements was also one that got little attention. After years in the wilderness, Sly Cooper returns with *Thieves in Time*. Made by Sanzura Games, it's the first *Sly* that won't be developed by Sucker Punch.

Hello Elizabeth
Just one look at *Bioshock Infinite* and we were blown away. Ken Levine is a genuis, and the game appears set to become an instant classic. We can't wait to get our hands on the real deal.

Jul

Flash Guardian
You dirty bunch of teases, Team Ico. You make our heartstrings go a-flutter with your adorable cat/mouse/griffin thingy and all that *Miller's Crossing* music, then *The Last Guardian* pulled yet another no-show at E3.

May the fourth be with you
If we had a dollar for every time an 'insider source' confirmed PS4 would be out next Christmas, we'd be… still fairly poor. July saw a rumor spring forth saying that the next PlayStation will have Kinect-style motion technology built in.

Aug

Price is right
Gamescom took pity on the moth-ridden wallets of gamers everywhere, as Sony announces global price drops on the entire PlayStation range. PS3 got slashed to as little as $250, Move got cheaper, and a redesigned $100 not-for-U.S. PSP model was revealed.

3D dance
We spent the weeks leading up to Christmas writing letters to rich uncles begging for a PlayStation 3D Display. At $500 it's pricey, but the ability for two players to view separate 3D images on it at once is an amazing innovation.

Dec

Go for launch
Flying reindeer everywhere collapsed in exhaustion (and possibly a dose of festive rabies) as Vita launched in Japan. With *Uncharted: Golden Abyss*, *Little Deviants*, and *F1 2011*, it's one of the stronger launch line-ups we've ever seen.

GOTY is go
We say goodnight and good luck to 2011, with the year ending in style as thoughts of Games of the Year swim in our heads. Will *Skyim* take the gong? Or maybe it's *Uncharted 3*? Possibly *Batman: Arkham City*? Find out in the next issue!

Jan

Massive success
Put down the flaming pitchforks, fanboys. On January 18, after almost a year as a 360 exclusive, *Mass Effect 2* landed on PS3. We're so tickled a color between red and purple, we award it a perfect 10/10. After all, sexing up blue aliens is worth a 9 on its own.

Raid over me
We were caught by complete surprise when we got our first glimpse of *Tomb Raider's* survival horror-esque reboot. Ms. Croft has matured with age; everything about her is far more believable, and her new adventure looks chilling and brilliant.

NGP breaks free
The worst-kept secret in games—other than that Hideo Kojima is an immaculately kept cyborg—finally escapes the bag as Sony officially unveils its portable powerhouse at its PlayStation Meeting on January 27. What did the initials mean again? New... Games... uh, Platform? Yeah, we're sure it was something like that.

Feb

Killer app
We knew Guerrilla's Helghast-kiboshing shooter would be awesome. What we didn't expect was just how enjoyable *Killzone 3* would be played in 3D using our Move, landing it a 10/10 in our March issue. Turns out killing space-Nazis is even better with a glowy wand.

Hellish holiday
The year's most startling image came from the empty eyes of the newly zombified kid in *Dead Island's* debut trailer. The final game couldn't live up to the hype-locomotive created by the teaser, but it's still a scrappy undead treat.

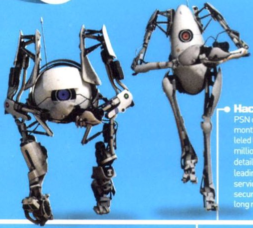
Mar

Charting a flop
By Chloe Frazer's spectacular Australian rear, David O Russell's *Uncharted* movie sounded dreadful. The director of *The Fighter* tried to allay fans' fears, saying it'll be "all about the family." Shortly after, Russell left the project.

Lady killer
In March we got our first glimpse of *Uncharted 3's* main villain. Named Katherine Marlowe, she was a far cry from *Among Thieves'* baldy Serbian baddie. She's obsessed with stealing Drake's ring and will gladly kill to get it. She's pure evil, we tells ya!

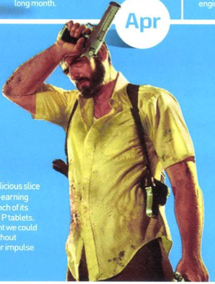
War words
Sigh. The almighty *COD* vs. *Battlefield* playground-style mud-slinging war began. We set our phasers to 'couldn't-give-a-baboon's-nipple' as Activision and EA flamed each other oover everything from frame rates to physics engines. Grow up, children.

Hack to the future
PSN crashed for about a month thanks to an unparalleled hackzor. More than 77 million PS3 users' personal details were jeopardized, leading Sony to close its online services for weeks to bolster security. April was a very long month.



Apr

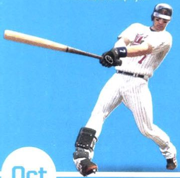
Shredded Wheatley
Valve's genius puzzler *Portal 2* scores a solid 9/10 as we went wrong behind the eyes for science guns, bright-colored goo, silent female leads, and a certain LOL-tastic Stephen Merchant-voiced droid. Ah, Wheatley—you were so naive.



Tablet topper
Sony tried to get a delicious slice of that multi-million-earning iPad pie with the launch of its insanely purdy S and P tablets. Just when we thought we could go the entire year without harvesting organs for impulse gadget-buying...

Sep

Here comes the Payne
After an eight-year break, everyone's favorite tortured, bullet-dodging cop returns as *Max Payne 3* got its first official trailer. This time out, our monologue-loving law enforcer has left New York for a security job in São Paulo.



Colossal score
Rose-tinted spectacles truly make everything 93 percent more awesome. Thankfully, no such eyewear was required for *Ico & Shadow Of The Colossus HD Collection* as we awarded it a 9/10.

Resistance is futile
We've always been partial to *Resistance's* E.T.-eviscerating ways, but the quality of the mood and sombre story in the third game really knocked our galactic socks off. Arguably no shooter has handled quiet moments this well since *Half-Life 2*.

Oct

Darkest knight
As daylight shrunk with the coming of autumn, it seems appropriate we should don a cape and introduce Gotham's seedier element to the business end of a Batarang. *Batman: Arkham City* landed this month and is everything we hoped for, winning a 10/10.

Killing fields
EA launched the final shot in its war against *Call Of Duty* and Activision as *Battlefield 3* was finally released. The single-player campaign was a mite disappointing, but incredible multiplayer means we still loved it. [See page 64 for our full review.]

Treasure found
The start of November saw us live like light-hating hermits. We barricaded ourselves indoors and forwent social contact to play the arse clean off the fantastic *Uncharted 3: Drake's Deception*. Hardly surprising it scooped 10/10, eh?

Nov

5

Resolutions 2012

Ten ways Sony can propel PlayStation into a bright, bold new year

1 Oversee a successful Vita launch
The price is reasonable, the launch titles look solid, and the functionality couldn't be cooler. Our simple advice? No creepy surrealist commercials this time!

2 Announce the PlayStation 4
Rumor has it Microsoft is planning to unveil a new Xbox at this year's E3. Time for Sony to break out the big guns and blow them away.

3 Re-design the XrossMediaBar
The 360's dashboard overhaul proved a mid-life-cycle update is feasible—now it's PS3's turn for a facelift. Less XMB, more of Vita's Live Area!

4 Support indie gaming on PSN
The PlayStation Network holds great potential for fruitful partnerships with unique independent developers. Time for Sony to follow through on its plans here.

5 Revitalize Move
It seems we're spending an awful lot of time playing party-style games with Move. We wouldn't mind a push toward exploring more innovative applications for motion control.

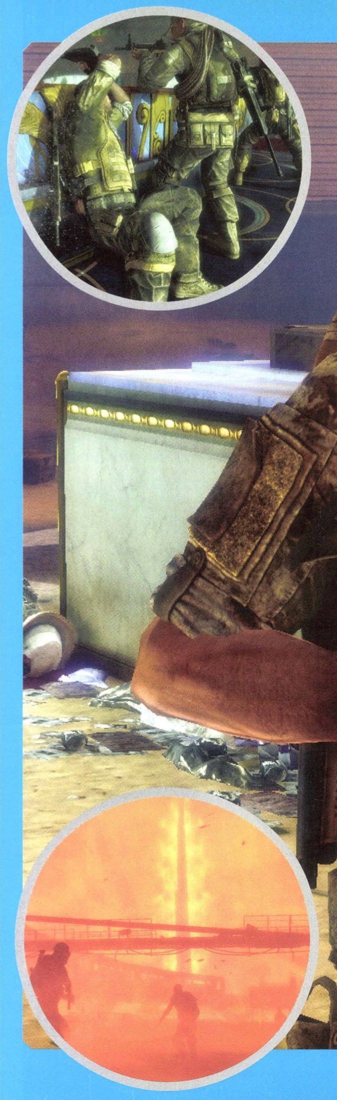
6 Sync our Trophies automatically
Wouldn't it be nice if we didn't have to manually sync our Trophies to our PSN account after amassing a wealth of virtual accolades?

7 Permanently Plussed
We totally dig all the discounts and free games we get as PlayStation Plus subscribers—but really, how about letting us keep those games if we had to end our membership?

8 Perk up PSN profiles
We'd love to spruce up our appearance when we head online. How about improved customization and personalization options and the ability to change our PSN ID?

9 Head for the Cloud
The connectivity capability between PS3 and Vita ensures some form of cloud-based gaming is coming, but we want a digital haven for all the media that currently resides on our PlayStations—now!

10 Open up the vaults
Whether via PSN or HD makeovers, it's time for all the great PSone and PS2 classics to be readily available for old PS3 gamers to relive and a new generation to discover.



6 Back on line

Spec Ops is alive and well after 18 months of being MIA

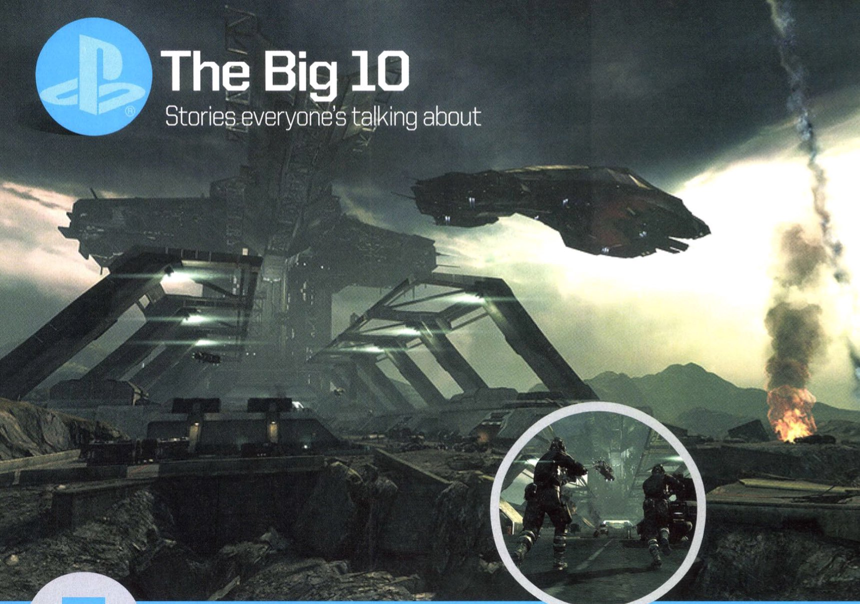
Typically when we use the term "zombie game," we're referring to a game with zombies *in* it. This time, however, the game itself is back from the dead. After a year and a half of total silence, Yager Development's *Specs Ops: The Line*—a military shooter set in a post-disaster Dubai that features stark moral choices and a *Heart of Darkness*-inspired storyline—has unexpectedly reemerged...and it's looking better than ever. So what happened? Lead designer Corey Davis explains:

"When we went to E3 in 2010, we realized that we had hit on a number things we were hoping to do with the title, but at the same time, it was a gut check for us. We went back and reevaluated a lot of things and we didn't feel like it achieved all the goals that we had. And so [publisher] 2K Games actually gave us the opportunity to go back in and focus on these dark themes that we have in the narrative and to make sure they come through as strongly as possible. It's a sort of a metaphor for a journey into your own soul, and we can't do that if we don't do it right because it'll come off cheap. So, actually, it's been great. It's been a year and a half of polish time for us to make sure the game came through the way we wanted."

It's disappointingly rare for a game to get a second lease on life, so we're delighted the team at Yager received such unprecedented support. With any luck, all that extra time will pay off when the game launches this spring.

The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



7

When worlds collide

PlayStation gamers impact the world of PC MMO EVE Online in Dust 514

While games like *Final Fantasy XI* and *DC Universe Online* have played an instrumental role in bringing the massively multiplayer online genre to the PlayStation platform, MMOs are rarely built specifically *for* consoles. In effort to remedy this, developer CCP Games—creator of the space-based MMO *EVE Online*—is working on an entirely new MMO first-person shooter exclusive to the PS3: *Dust 514*. But don't expect a run-of-the-mill shooter with a bunch of military dudes running around screaming "Oscar Mike" at each other. CCP's FPS is unlike anything we've seen before.

For starters, *Dust 514* is a free-to-play MMO set in (and directly connected to) the PC sci-fi universe of *EVE Online*. This universe is composed of thousands of solar systems, each containing a number of planets. On the PC side, *EVE Online* players are starship pilots vying for galactic influence; they form corporations to dominate the player-driven economy, and can even engage in large-scale fleet battles. With the introduction of *Dust 514*, PS3 gamers fight for control of planetary resources as mercenaries. The outcome of our battles will have a substantial impact on the economy and control of the universe shared by both games. So how does it work?

We start by creating our fully customizable soldier. From here, *EVE Online* players can hire *Dust 514* mercenaries as contract killers, sending them off to fight for strategic planetary structures and colonies essential to corporate coffers. As we battle for dominance (either on foot or through the game's many pilotable vehicles) we can potentially conquer and occupy regions of a planet, or a world in its entirety. Of course, beneficial alliances (or deadly rivalries) can be formed between players of both games, creating an ever-shifting dynamic in power and control. Participating in battles nets us skill points that can be used to train new abilities, increase proficiency in specialized gear, or modify and upgrade existing equipment. Once we fulfill a contract, *EVE Online* players must pay us in in-game currency known as ISK. With a wallet full of cash, we can stock up on defensive items, such as turrets or armor (and even orbital strike capabilities to deal with hostile space pilots), or pony up for prototype weaponry in hopes of gaining an edge on the battlefield.

CCP's goal of tying together two different MMOs (across two separate platforms) under a single shared universe is incredibly ambitious. The potential impact this could have on the way we think about the limitations of games is enormous.

8

Infinite Affection

Meet the real Elizabeth

We've seen a lot of cosplay in our time—some of it great, some of it...not—but nothing has blown us away quite like this beautiful imagining of *BioShock Infinite's* Elizabeth. Behind the costume is Anna Aleksandrovna Moleva, a Russian gamer also known as Ormeli (find more of her work at ormeli.deviantart.com). "I love *BioShock*," Moleva admits, though she hasn't cosplayed anything from the previous *BioShock* titles because, "For me as a cosplayer, the characters in it were not right." That was until Elizabeth. Apparently the corset was the hardest part of the costume to perfect: "It consists of three different fabrics, fine detail, and it's tight at the waist." Difficult? Maybe. Worth it? Definitely.

9

The Readers' Most Wanted

With so many big-name titles shipped for the Holiday season, the new year brings big changes to our Most Wanted list. *Final Fantasy XIV Online* surprisingly ascends to the number one spot even though its release is still at least a year away. Capcom, with *DmC* leading the way at number three, is very well represented with five highly anticipated games. The surprises? Pirate RPG *Risen 2* and Move fantasy adventure *Sorcery* crashing the top 20 party.

01 ***Final Fantasy XIV Online***
02 ***Metal Gear Solid: Rising***
03 ***DmC: Devil May Cry***
04 ***Final Fantasy XIII-2***
05 ***Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City***
06 ***Street Fighter X Tekken***
07 ***BioShock Infinite***
08 ***SoulCalibur V***
09 ***Mass Effect 3***
10 ***Prototype 2***
11 ***Max Payne 3***
12 ***Ninja Gaiden 3***
13 ***Far Cry 3***
14 ***Risen 2: Dark Waters***
15 ***Sorcery***
16 ***Asura's Wrath***
17 ***Dragon's Dogma***
18 ***Lollipop Chainsaw***
19 ***XCOM***
20 ***Inversion***

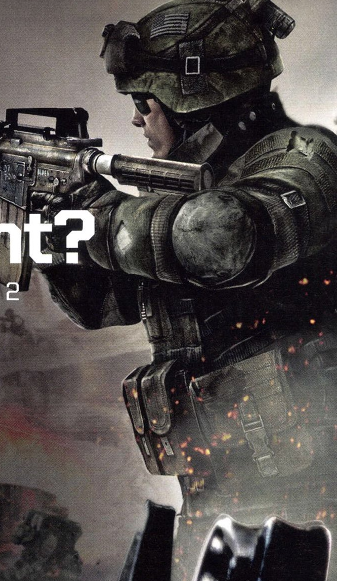
DmC

RISEN 2

Stats in this chart appear courtesy of Ipsos OTX MediaCT's GamePlan Insights. All games are PS3 titles. Polling period was October 17–30, 2011.

10 Will Crytek save Homefront?

PTOM editors argue whether Homefront 2 is a lost cause or potential goldmine



Yes
Says the super patriot
Ryan Taljonick

Alright, so *Homefront* was far from incredible. I remember its characters about as well as I remember what I ate for dinner four months ago—and I have a pretty photographic memory when it comes to dinner. But I *do* remember *Homefront's* setting quite well.

Seeing the citizens of an occupied America beg for mercy from North Korean troops before being brutally executed is pretty heavy stuff. I really wanted to get invested in the story. I really wanted to get to know the characters. The underlying elements were in place for a truly epic experience; they were just held together by some rather generic glue.

That's where Crytek comes in. They've got the opportunity to approach the series with a detached eye. We know the earliest we'll see *Homefront 2* is in 2013. That's a lot of time to examine the original's strengths and weaknesses—to sit down and figure out a new direction. Considering the sequel already has a setting and conflict in place, Crytek just has to focus on that glue. I'm all for second chances. I really think *Homefront* has potential, and I'd love to revisit its unsettling world if for no other reason than to repel its hostile occupants. And hey, if nothing else, at least we know it'll look pretty, right?

No
Says cynical super skeptic
Scott Butterworth

If Crytek couldn't make *Crysis 2* great, how can we possibly expect them to save *Homefront*? I have a great deal of respect for Crytek's undeniable technical genius, but that game was desperately unoriginal. I mean, a linear first-person shooter set in New York during an alien invasion? It's like some kind of crazy cliché Madlib!

Sure, one could argue that *Homefront's* inherently more interesting premise could inspire Crytek to create a more original experience, but bear in mind that even the original *Homefront* couldn't deliver on *Homefront's* potential. While the game did manage to provide players with a handful of memorably shocking moments, the majority of the game still felt like any other contemporary FPS. Crytek has no investment in the idea of a gutsy, realistic take on war, so believing they could somehow bring new life to such a personal project would be a mistake. Without a deep, passionate commitment to the idea, the results will inevitably feel hollow.

I'll admit, the team at Crytek is certainly technically adept, and *Homefront's* approach has always appealed to me. But the developer and the game just don't seem like a good match, and given the products we've seen from both parties before, well, let's just say I have my doubts.

▲ With Kaos Studios closed, *Homefront 2* will be developed by Crytek for 2013.

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Mike Mignola talks all things Hellboy
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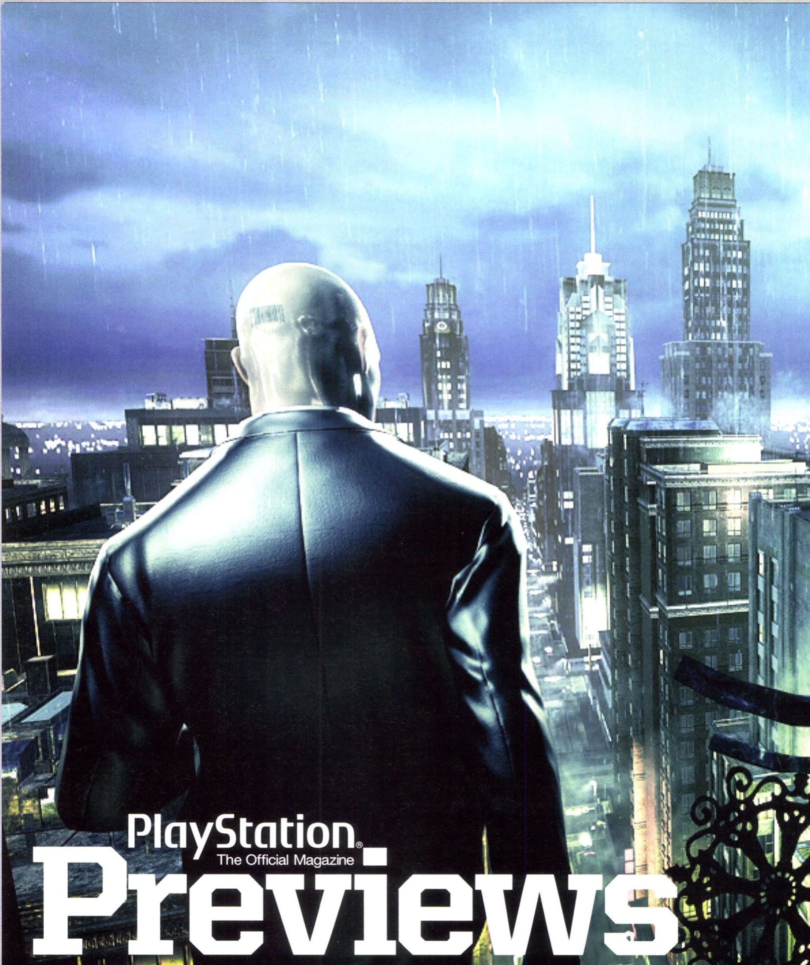

PlayStation®
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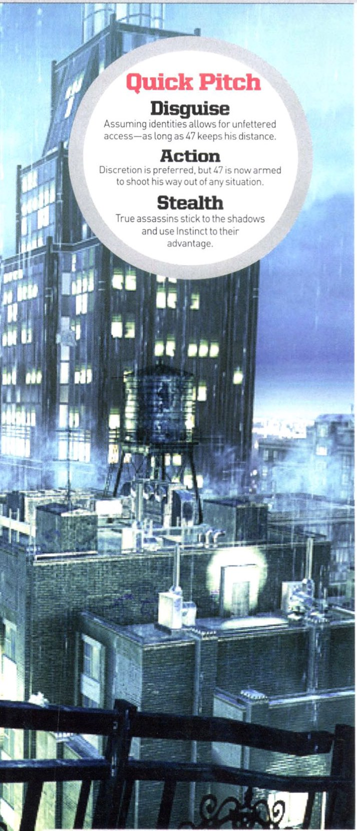
Previews



Quick Pitch

Disguise
Assuming identities allows for unfettered access—as long as 47 keeps his distance.

Action
Discretion is preferred, but 47 is now armed to shoot his way out of any situation.

Stealth
True assassins stick to the shadows and use Instinct to their advantage.

UPDATE Format **PS3** ETA **TDB 2012** Pub **Square Enix** Dev **IO Interactive**

Hitman Absolution

Without a trace

The *Hitman: Absolution* E3 demo was an all-action thrill ride littered with broken glass, bullet casings, and dead police bodies. All 16 minutes of gameplay are now available for viewing online (see the QR code sidebar)—but while this cinematic footage broadens Agent 47's appeal, many hardcore *Hitman* followers have erupted in a defensive outrage.

It begins in a library with 47 under siege by Chicago police. Sneaking behind cover and hanging from ledges, he takes the cops down one by one before stealing a uniform, taking a hostage, and shooting his way out. He flees across rooftops while under fire from a helicopter, kills two cops in a hippy drug den, and evades SWAT police before disappearing into the streets of Chicago.

Hitman games are known for disguise and deception, not firefights and cover systems. It's a series where—if everything is executed correctly—the only one who dies is the target, and everyone else believes the death to be an accident. It's a series where the highest honor is obtaining the rank of Silent Assassin—no shots fired, no alarms raised, no unnecessary kills, no evidence left behind.

Stalker

"The way we played through the E3 code allowed us to naturally introduce a number of mechanics while keeping up a dramatic storyline," says *Absolution's* game director, Tore Blystad. "But the *Hitman* games have always been primarily about stealth and this is still where we put our focus and effort. If the player wants to play with disguise as a primary focus they would take down the first lone police officer encountered and steal his outfit—but the library is packed with police, so it's not easy."

It makes for a dull spectator sport at E3, but it's possible to blend in and walk straight for the library's front door without killing a soul—so long as 47 doesn't get stopped on the way. Equipping an appropriate disguise was the key to almost any door in previous *Hitman* titles, but enemy A.I. has received a bit of a makeover in *Absolution*. "The disguise allows the player to walk around in the open as long as he doesn't get too close to an

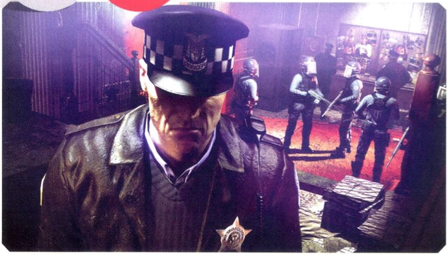
▸▸

Hitman gameplay demo

Scan the code and watch it now

At last, the demo we saw at e3 hits youtube. IO show off one of Absolution's early levels in truncated form, but remember – just because they play like Rambo, it doesn't mean you have to.

http://www.youtube.com/hitman



Stealth remains a crucial component to Agent 47's success. Of course, simply killing everyone works as well.

Agent 47 evades enemy forces, ruining yet another suit in the process.

If things go awry and our cover is blown, we can resort to shootouts.

NPC in a similar outfit," explains Blystad. "They'll start to see through the disguise when you get too close. The player can use Instinct to blend in, but it has to be used sparingly."

Instinct—a mechanic similar to Batman's Detective Mode—lets 47 sense enemies through walls and enhances his disguises by allowing him to pick up on the nuances of his foes. Activating Instinct mode while in a cop uniform caused 47 to pull his cap down low, blending in with unsuspecting police more effectively.

Mass Murderer

Of course, if things go awry and our cover is blown, we can resort to shootouts. Gunplay was never a strong point in the series. In prior games, it felt sloppy and unpolished. In *Absolution*, however, the shooting mechanics have received a complete overhaul, and a brand new cover system has been added, resulting in firefights that are almost as satisfying as nailing a stealth kill. "Getting a gun is easy now—just find that lone cop you would otherwise steal the uniform from and break his neck," says Blystad. "From then on it's lock and load; the NPCs are ready for a fight from any direction. Believability is closely linked with the NPC behavior and reactions to the player, so we added a 'reasoning grid' that allows them to have awareness of the world they inhabit."

Keeping enemies unaware of our presence is important; if they get too suspicious, they will call in powerful reinforcements.

"If the player wants to be efficient, it's best to start in a corner and quickly get through the enemies before the alert can spread too far. Worst case, everyone is alerted and SWAT is called in with even bigger guns and Kevlar vests. The combat A.I. works in groups, so using the new cover system would be a safer solution than going head-on."

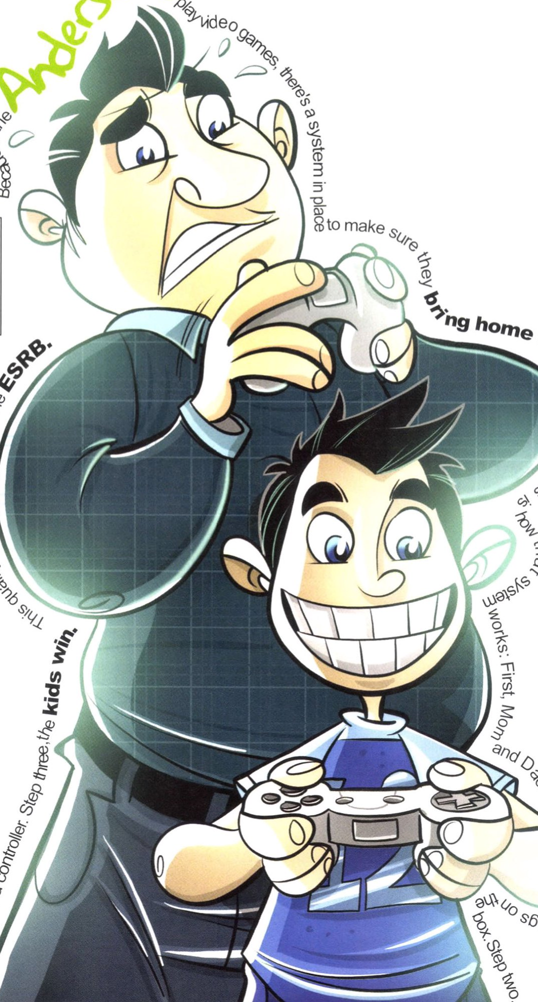
While *Absolution* is shaping to be the most accessible realization of the *Hitman* franchise yet, we're looking forward to scoring that ever-elusive Silent Assassin rating. If we run out of patience, at least we know we can just go on a shooting spree instead.

JAMES COATES

Dev Talk

"We've made *Absolution* the hardest *Hitman* game when it comes to purist, hardcore playstyle. The Silent Assassin is still the most sought after rating for a hardcore *Hitman* player."

Tore Blystad
Game Director



Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Step two: everyone gets a controller. Step three, the **kids win.**

This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

erved.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **March** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Slant Six Games**

Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City

Survival is gone, but the horror lives on

Hundreds of zombies grabbing at us from all sides, countless darkened corridors echoing with the eerie screams of distant threats, and all kinds of familiar, friendly faces, from zombie dogs to Claire Redfield. *Resident Evil: Operation Raccoon City* may be the first true action game of the series, but our hands-on experience revealed not only an intriguing, horror-infused approach to third-person combat but also a deep commitment to the *Resident Evil* universe.

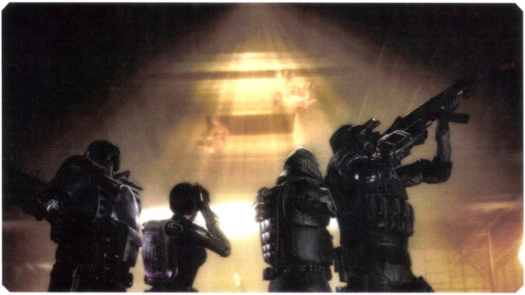
Our very first mission, for example, sent us to meet up with classic badass HUNK inside Umbrella Corp, where we were tasked us with eliminating rogue scientist William Birkin (talk about fan service). But before we could dive in, we had to suit up. *Raccoon City* features six thoroughly psychotic commandos, each with unique stats and class-based abilities.

While each characters' innate stats (e.g. reload times, health, and so on) can't be upgraded, new passive and active abilities can be unlocked and enhanced as we progress. Want to control Tyrants and other bio-organic weapons? Pick the field scientist. Want to stealth around the battlefield with short bursts of invisibility? Pick the recon class. Don't want to commit to a single set of abilities? Don't worry, all experience gained can be applied to

▲ At various points in the narrative, we can decide to either break from canon or remain on canon (e.g. kill Leon or let him live).

Your Brain on Drugs An early, virus-fueled boss battle gets ugly

After rogue scientist William Birkin (remember him?) intentionally dosed himself with Umbrella's G-virus, his mutated form came hulking after us.



Cutscenes will accommodate whichever characters we select for our team. Even dialogue will change accordingly.

> How could we not love shoving a grenade into a zombie's mouth?

any of the six characters so we don't have to feel married to a particular class. Plus, all that experience carries over the game's competitive multiplayer as well, which should make it easier to create a balanced team when the time comes.

With our own character and weapon loadout selected, we were then able to round out our team with three A.I. partners, almost like building a party in an RPG. Normally the entire campaign would be available for four-player co-op, but lonely gamers can always count on the computer to provide reasonably competent backup with no micromanaging. While this definitely made our experience a bit more forgiving (free revivals!), it didn't necessarily make it any less creepy.

Zombies still play a large role in the game despite the primary threat being U.S. military forces and expendable on-site security staffers. We spent plenty of time beating back zombies as they pounced on us *Dead Rising*-style, grabbing them as "human" shields, and even turning them on our enemies by leaving the living wounded instead of killing them outright.

We also spent plenty of time creeping down linear corridors and shooting soldiers from behind chest-high cover, but this proved slightly more frustrating. The automatic, snap-to cover system didn't always engage when we needed it to, and the aiming felt a bit sluggish, as if our gun had to catch up to the reticle.

Of course, these complaints are relatively easy to remedy, and the close quarters combat and slick "ability kills" certainly helped curtail our aggravation. How could we not love shoving a live grenade into a zombie's mouth before punting him back into a crowd of the undead? Once we're able to unlock more abilities like that one, *Raccoon City* is sure to bust wide open. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

Cast List

Beltway
Demolition

Bertha
Medic

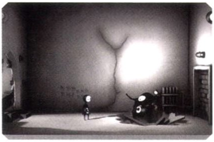
Four Eyes
Field Scientist

Lupo
Assault

Spectre
Surveillance

Vector
Recon

Could Be a Contender



Format **PS Vita** ETA **Spring** Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Santa Monica Studios**

Escape Plan

Get out while you still can

The Premise

Lil and Laarg are captured by evil mastermind Bakuki and must escape from his massive prison facility, using Vita's touchscreen to complete physics puzzles.

The Reality

Utilizing both the front and back touchpads to interact with the world, we can push objects into the background or foreground, allowing for all sorts of puzzles that wouldn't be possible anywhere but Vita.

The Hook

Clever and humorous puzzles match the noir-esque black-and-white visuals to create a wonderfully unique looking experience. Expect to laugh at the absurdly violent things that happen to Lil and Laarg.

The Chances

There aren't yet a whole lot of games using Vita's touchscreen potential to this great affect, so we expect *Escape Plan* to capture our attention.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **Capcom** Dev **CyberConnect2**

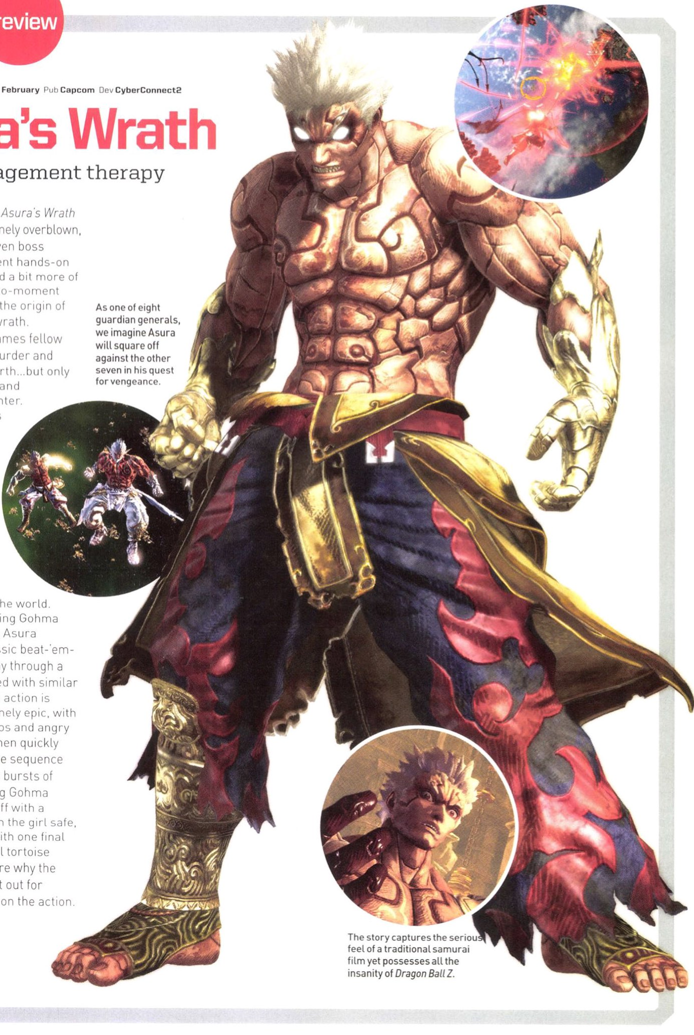
Asura's Wrath

Anger management therapy

There's more to *Asura's Wrath* than its awesomely overblown, quick-time driven boss battles. During a recent hands-on demo, we experienced a bit more of the game's moment-to-moment gameplay, as well as the origin of the aforementioned wrath. Basically, a traitor frames fellow demigod Asura for murder and casts him down to Earth...but only after killing his wife and kidnapping his daughter. After a few centuries encased in stone, Asura awakens with a serious thirst for vengeance, but first he must rescue a young girl who came to pray at his feet, only to be swept away by Gohma—the general term for the various monsters that roam the world.

As one gorilla-looking Gohma escaped with the girl, Asura engaged in some classic beat-'em-action, fighting his way through a short, linear level filled with similar gorilla monsters. The action is high-energy and insanely epic, with plenty of flashy combos and angry grunting. The game then quickly transitioned to a chase sequence that allowed us to fire bursts of energy at the escaping Gohma before finishing him off with a quick-time event. With the girl safe, we were then faced with one final challenge: a giant, evil tortoise boss. We're still unsure why the animal kingdom has it out for Asura, but we're sold on the action.

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH



As one of eight guardian generals, we imagine Asura will square off against the other seven in his quest for vengeance.

The story captures the serious feel of a traditional samurai film yet possesses all the insanity of *Dragon Ball Z*.

さいたまスーパーアリーナ

HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **THQ** Dev **Yuke's**

UFC Undisputed 3

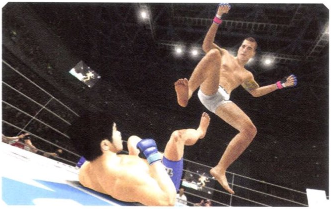
Fighting with Pride

Following the release of *UFC 2009 Undisputed*, developer Yuke's had but one year to crank out 2010's successful sequel. Now, with a development cycle nearly twice as long, Yuke's has been hard at work shaping *Undisputed 3* into the baddest MMA fighting game around. After getting our faces stomped into paste in the game's new Pride mode, we're inclined to believe the devs have been spending their time wisely. Based on traditional Pride tournament rules, Pride mode scores fights based on aggression and KO/submission attempts and adds a variety of brutal attacks considered illegal under UFC regulations.

Our first Pride bout ended in a bloodbath. We cringed as a hard-hitting knee rearranged our face, sending us to the ground. Our opponent took the opportunity to hit us with a bone-crunching soccer kick, an attack only allowed in Pride mode. Helpless, we watched in horror as he repeatedly stomped our head into the floor. Our nose exploded. Blood splattered the mat. Our final moment of consciousness ended with a knee to the face (also illegal in UFC matches when a fighter is down).

Pride mode takes brutality to a whole new level for the *UFC* series—we're just anxious to get a shot at a rematch come February.

RYAN TALJONICK



▲ UFC fighters can also participate in Pride fights, and vice versa. Brock Lesnar vs. Don Frye? Yes, please.

▲ In addition to a roster of more than 25 Pride fighters, Bas Rutten and Stephen Quadros provide commentary for each Pride bout.

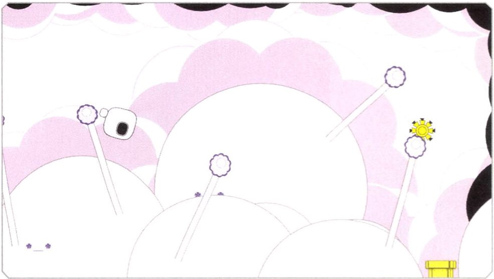
HANDS-ON Format **PS3** ETA **February** Pub **EA** Dev **Starbreeze Studios**

Syndicate

Mo' money, mo' problems

In the year 2069, corporations rule—and not in a totally rad '90s kind of way. Special agents, imbued with special neural chips that allow for and are vulnerable to inter-mind hacking, are hired by mega-companies that wage covert wars to steal valuable information from one another. In our first taste of *Syndicate's* cooperative mode, we teamed with three other players to steal information and kill enemy guns for hire. Using class-specific Apps like the Medic's C2C, which heals the entire team at once, we fought our way through randomly generated enemies to track and procure precious cyber loot. Talk about cutthroat business practices... TAYLOR COCKE

▲ In *Syndicate's* world, over 50 percent of the population is "Chip'd."

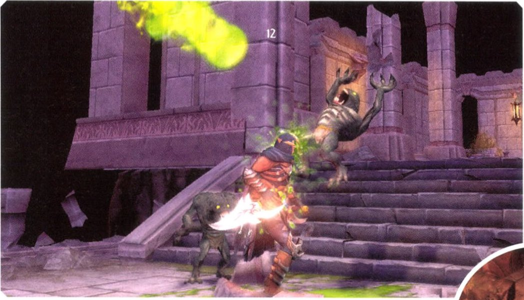


HANDS-ON Format **PS Vita** ETA **TBD** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Queasy Games**

Sound Shapes

Jump to the rhythm

Jump on a platform and a snare drum kicks in. Stick to a block, and enter the guitars. Grab a collectible and in come the keys. This is the wonderful musical world of the puzzle platformer *Sound Shapes*. Rather than the music being secondary to the gameplay, a song reveals itself as each level is played. At the most basic level, *Sound Shapes* is simply about controlling a music-making ball. Stages begin with just the basic beat; nearly every platform we touch adds to



Some dungeon decorations don't have a function, but instead indicate an achievement that's been completed.

HANDS-ON Format **PS3/PS VITA** ETA **TBD** Pub **SCEA** Dev **Idol Minds**

Ruin

Dungeon by design

Even adventurers need a home. Preferably, one that's capable of defending itself as said adventurer is off, well, adventuring. For those, like us, with eyes for both interior design and homeland defense, *Ruin's* Lairs should be right up our alley.

We start in the Sanctum, the central room of our soon-to-be vast Lair. There, we're free to decorate with Relics that we attain through various quests. Rather than utilize a traditional skill tree, *Ruin's* Relics are what we use to customize skills and stats, and even the Lair itself. It's a really interesting take on traditional character building. However, Lairs serve a far greater purpose than merely acting as a place to store our loot—what good is a tricked-out dungeon of our own if our buddies can't come check it out? Anyone at anytime can attempt to raid our Lair, regardless of whether or not we're actively playing. Intruders will be challenged by a spontaneously generated dungeon populated by our customized minions and traps.

We can even unlock new additions to our Lair, like the Forge and Minion Den, whose Relics allow us to customize our weapons and minion abilities to further bolster our defenses. Action RPGs usually have some sort of PvP mode, but there aren't many that let us create entire dungeons to violently put down our friends and enemies. We're suckers for customization, so the opportunity to create a unique base for our adventurer has us pretty pumped.

With its unique take on player-on-player combat, tons of Relics to snag, and slick action RPG combat, *Ruin* has the potential to draw a large, dedicated fan base. TAYLOR COCKE

Quest Connect

There's no need to miss out on our hack-'n'-slash action anymore should life drag us away from our PS3. *Ruin* features PS3/Vita connectivity, so a game saved on one platform can easily be continued on the other.

---

the cacophony, eventually resulting in a full musical track of our creation.

Especially creative types can compose music by producing custom levels with an extensive (but easy-to-use) level editor. Think of it as a cross between *LittleBigPlanet's* level creator and a music sequencer. Not only can we design and share these levels, we also create the music that accompany them. For a budding level designer, it's a great exercise to shape platform levels and then be rewarded with a song. Whereas a fledgling musician can start with the music and work their way back to level design.

Once a created level goes online, others will have the option to remix it, which means endless possibilities when it comes to variety of design. There's no better way to appreciate someone else's work than to create another version from it. TAYLOR COCKE

Where the hell is...

Gotham City Imposters (Warner Bros.)

"Batman cosplayers will finally run rampant on PSN come January 10, 2012"

The latest on...

New shots, new games, new info

Sniper Elite V2

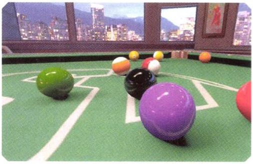
Format **PS3** ETA **Spring** Pub **505 Games** Dev **Rebellion**

All the cool things we've ever seen a sniper do in a World War II movie? That's this game. Locate an advantageous position, mark targets to measure distance, account for bullet drop, hold breath to steady the gun, time shots with explosions to mask the crack of the rifle, enjoy a remarkably gory bullet cam displaying the kill—the whole nine yards. Stealth and strategy are a lone wolf's only allies as we infiltrate 1945 Berlin on a mission to assassinate the Nazi's V2 rocket scientists. With our trusty rifle in hand, we're prepared to get tactical and leave our run-and-gun instincts at home.

Naruto Shippuden: Ultimate Ninja Storm Generations

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD 2012** Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **CyberConnect2**

Yes, it's another *Naruto* fighting game. New ninjas join the lineup and a whole new selection of online modes should keep diehard fans happy.



Hustle Kings

Format **PS Vita** ETA **TBD** Pub **SCEA** Dev **VooFoo Studios**

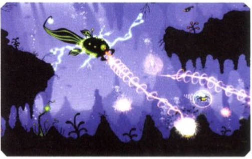
Hustle Kings is a familiar title to PS3 billiards fans, and the same general principals apply for Vita. It takes advantage of the new portable system's touchscreen in lining up and taking shots, but pool is still pool.

Kart Parts
Bodies
?

ModNation Racers: Road Trip

Format **PS Vita** ETA **TBD** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCE Studios San Diego**

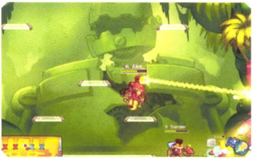
PS3 *ModNation Racers* players will be pleased that the mods and karts they've created can be imported into the Vita version. Creating new tracks is easier than ever thanks to the Vita's touchscreen capabilities.



Alien Spidy

Format **PSN** ETA **Q2** Pub **Kalypso Media Digital**
Dev **Enigma Software Productions**

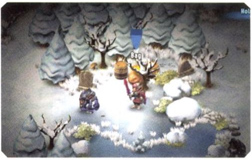
There are two things that we're deathly afraid of: aliens and spiders. Put them together and we turn into itsy bitsy girls—but give that alien spider the ability to solve platforming puzzles as he embarks on a journey to rescue insect friends, and suddenly we're tangled in a web of joy.



Awesomenauts

Format **PSN** ETA **February** Pub **DTP** Dev **Romino Games**

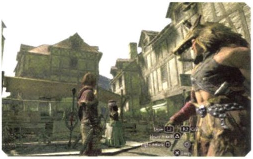
Awesomenauts throws us in the midst of a galactic war that combines platforming and multiplayer online battle arenas. We play as mercenaries who aren't in this war for glory. Rather, they're in it for...awesomeness? Yeah, something like that.



Rainbow Moon

Format **PSN** ETA **Q1** Pub **EastAsiaSoft**
Dev **SideQuest Studios**

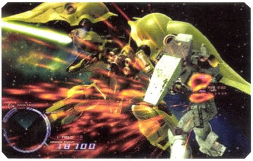
Rainbow Moon is a strategy RPG that leads us through more than 20 dungeons as we search for a way to return our hero to his home. We'll fight through hordes of monsters before he can make it back. Considering the title, maybe we'll even see some rainbows or moons on the way.



Dragon's Dogma

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Capcom** Dev **Capcom**

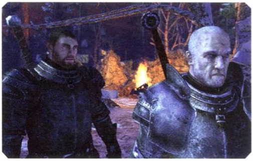
How long does it take to kill a rock monster? We're not really sure. After 10 minutes of assaulting an impressive golem with our helper pawns, enchanted arrows, and even a medieval turret, our game demoers simply moved on. Hmm...



Mobile Suit Gundam Unicorn

Format **PS3** ETA **Spring** Pub **Namco Bandai** Dev **From Software**

We were psyched when we saw the word "unicorn," but now we know *Gundam Unicorn* is not actually about mythical creatures. Instead, it's an action adventure title based on the first three episodes of the anime.



Game of Thrones

Format **PS3** ETA **TBD** Pub **Atlus** Dev **Cyanide Studios**

Winter most certainly is coming, and so is an action-RPG based on the *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels and HBO's *Game of Thrones* TV show. We've read the books and watched the series—it's about time we get a chance to play it.

Gut Reaction

The awesome and the awful

▲Jak is Back

Sony recently announced the *Jak and Daxter Collection* with HD, 3D, and Trophy support.

▲Snaaaaaaake!

The rumor mill is churnin' as we hear unconfirmed reports of *Metal Gear Solid 5*'s development.

▲Bundle of Joy

A Vita package deal scores us a case, 4GB memory stick, and a copy of *Little Deviants*.

▼Empty Wallets

After this year's big releases, we're swimming in piles of games. We used to swim in piles of money.

▼Share-down

Game purchases from the PS Store can now only be activated on two PS3s linked to one PSN account.

▼SOPA

Sony supports a bill aimed at halting Internet piracy. It could also potentially lead to Internet censorship.

N7
San Romero
KNIGHTS

2012's HUGEST GAMES

The new year looms and with it comes the next monumental wave of PlayStation games. Some games will stand above the rest, some games won't need any hype, some games will simply and unquestionably be *huge.*

BioShock Infinite...**Mass Effect 3**...
Grand Theft Auto V!

These blockbusters-to-be headline PTOM's look at the 14 PS3 games that are certain to consume our lives for the next 12 months. Let the games begin...now!

Pub **2K GAMES**
Dev **IRRATIONAL GAMES**
ETA **TBD**

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

For God and country

LOWEST PRICE
FIREWORK
SPECIAL
FIREWOR
50

Why it's huge

The original *BioShock* was a watershed moment for the games medium. By combining the accessible, mainstream fun of a top-tier shooter with the breathtaking world and artful storytelling of a timeless RPG, the development team at Irrational Games managed to transcend many of videogames' long-accepted limitations. It was subversive, intellectual, and only possible in an interactive setting. While *BioShock 2* proved a satisfying follow-up, *BioShock Infinite* will be Irrational and Ken Levine's first project since the original game launched back in 2007. But *Infinite* is more than a pedigree. In fact, part of what makes the game so exciting is its ambitious new direction. Gone is the well-established world of Rapture. In its place, we have Columbia, a massive city in the sky filled with turn of the century charm, a rollercoaster-esque rail system, and a whole mess of problems, including rips in the space-time continuum. With so many generic brown shooters on the market, *Infinite*'s wild originality demands our full attention.

What to expect

Like the original *BioShock*, *Infinite* integrates RPG-ish character development with solid first-person shooting. In addition to equipping upgradable firearms, we can load up on vigors and nostrums—essentially this game's versions of plasmids and tonics—that augment our innate abilities. Lighting storms, a deadly murder of crows, enemy levitation—the possibilities are practically endless. Unlike previous *BioShock* games, however, the story revolves around a pair of very vocal allies rather than a single silent protagonist. Booker DeWitt, a former union buster, has been hired by shady, unseen employers to rescue a woman named Elizabeth from Columbia. Problem is, after revealing its secret status as America's steampunk Death Star, the entire city went rogue and eventually collapsed into civil war. So while locating Elizabeth won't be difficult, fighting our way past vengeful robot guardians, violent, xenophobic fanatics, and Elizabeth's own self-destructive powers might prove more challenging. Fortunately, having Elizabeth along for the ride could actually make life easier at points. Tag-team plasmid attacks, anyone?

What we want

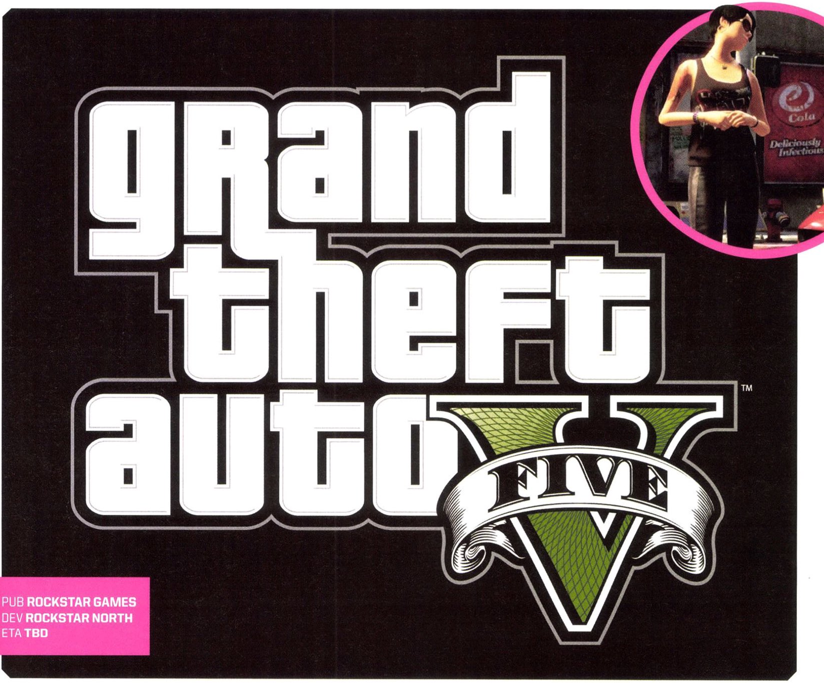
Naturally, we're super excited to see what kind of cool abilities the team at Irrational has cooked up (what could possibly top shooting bees out of our wrists?), but beyond that, we hope *Infinite* follows *BioShock*'s example of mature, subtle storytelling. One of the original game's greatest strengths was its atmosphere—rather than assaulting players with ham-fisted voiceovers, the world of Rapture told its own story. We already know that *Infinite* will tackle heavy subjects like ultranationalism and eugenics, and we applaud this unflinchingly intellectual approach. We just hope Irrational can manage the same deft execution that made *BioShock*'s anti-objectivism moral so palatable. Oh, and one other thing: please, no multiplayer. Seriously guys, we play *BioShock* games for the campaign. While we have faith Levine and company could come up with something cool, we'd prefer that they just focus on the story. ■

WANTED
~BOOKER D
A MALE OF 37 Y
6 FEET OF HEIG
WANTED
~MISS ELIZABETH~
~BOOKER DEWITT~
A MALE OF 37 YEARS
6 FEET OF HEIGHT
195 POUNDS OF WEIGHT
A WHITE MAN
WITH GREEN EYES
BEARS A SCAR OVER
THE RIGHT EYE
REWARD IS OFFERED
IN GOLD BULLION!
ANTE

With so many generic brown shooters on the market, *Infinite's* wild originality demands our full attention.

The next great crime spree

GRAND THEFT AUTO


grand
theft
auto
V
FIVE
TM
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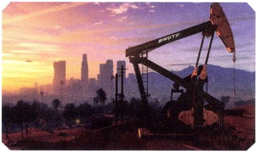
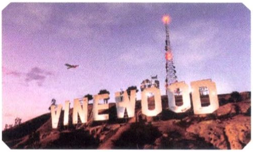
Deliciously Infectious

PUB **ROCKSTAR GAMES**
DEV **ROCKSTAR NORTH**
ETA **TBD**





Why it's huge

On the dreary morning of Tuesday October 25, 2011, without prior warning, Rockstar tweeted a #GTAV hashtag with a link to their site, displaying a new logo—and a date for a trailer.

The point being, the world's most notorious A-lister doesn't phone ahead, it arrives. Like a true celebrity, it only needs to show its face and things happen. Within minutes, #GTAV was one of the biggest trending topics on Twitter, and headline writers went into overdrive. Even more amazingly—typical Rockstar—it dropped slap-bang into the busiest part of the year, with *Uncharted 3*, *Skyrim*, *Battlefield 3*, and *Modern Warfare 3* all jostling for attention. With almost no real information to offer, it blew them out of the water. *Modern Warfare* might do sales, but *GTAV* is the most anticipated game in the world—not a yearly sequel, an event.

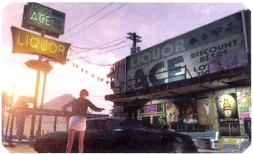
What to expect

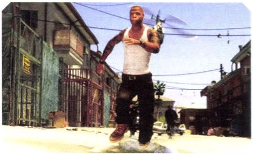
It's set in Los Santos, the fictionalized Los Angeles of PS2's *GTA: San Andreas*, with a huge diversity of reality-inspired locations. It's the ideal setting for a tale of economic collapse: graffiti-wracked ghettos just blocks from gated mansions. In the trailer's defining thematic scene, we see a banner promoting a half-built skyscraper: Join our Mile High Club. Downtown's new and most exciting complex, says the ad. The final words paint a broader picture of the economic situation: High rise, low rates. But the real clincher is when the camera pans back and the whole thing is dwarfed by a towering, shining skyscraper—belonging to a bank. A rags-to-riches tale is no longer guaranteed, with the anonymous narrator explaining how he moved to Los Santos to retire, leaving behind "that line of work". He talks of buying a big house to be "like all the other dads". Yet he ends with, "You know how it is..." as we cut to three men raiding a jewelry store.

What we want

Out of all gaming franchises, *Grand Theft Auto* is the one that makes the point of consistently outthinking and surprising us. We want bigger, broader, deeper across the breadth of this open-world gem, but even the short glimpse we received in the trailer seems to indicate that's on the way. Still, how compelling would it be if some of *L.A. Noire's* facial expression tech made its way into *GTAV's* character interactions? There's also been speculation that the game might feature a multiple protagonist storyline (centered, perhaps, on the three jewelry-heist characters in the trailer), which could lend an intriguing multi-perspective flow to the game's narrative. And call us superficial if you will but, considering that there's a jet fighter in the game, we have to hope that the environmental destructibility will be ramped up to ridiculous proportions. Regardless of whether Rockstar comes through on our wish list, we can't wait to book a trip to Los Santos to see what wonders await. ■

> The world's most notorious A-lister doesn't phone ahead, it arrives. Like a true celebrity, it only needs to show its face and things happen.





Rampant Rumors

Mere days following *Grand Theft Auto V's* announce, "leaked" details flooded the Internet. Anonymously sourced to either a rogue games journalist, departing dev team member, or an alleged QA tester, there's no way to validate the information—but it sure is fun to ponder...

The Hero

The main protagonist in *GTAV* is purported to be "Ray", a 53-year-old father/divorcee/ex-con from upstate Liberty who recently moved to Los Santos.

The Story

Two warring Mexican drug cartels, X1 and the Cholula Cartel, are apparently the focus of the storyline, but expect encounters with African-American gangs, Russian and Irish mobs, and Asian gangs including the Triads, Yakuza, and the Korean mob.

The World

The bulk of the action is said to occur in Los Santos, the game's major city, which is reported to be 50 percent larger than *GTAIV's* Liberty City. However, there are supposed to be a handful of smaller cities and towns in the surrounding countryside, with Los Santos only covering about one-third of the overall game map.

The Rides

Cars, boats, helicopters, and planes are said to be pilotable in the game with the only exception being commercial airline jets. The cars will reportedly be customizable, and drives from the desert to snow-covered mountains possible with stops to refill for gas.

The Firepower

Weapons are apparently customizable, but visits to underground arms dealers are required to acquire ammunition. A remote-controlled explosive miniature truck called the "RC Tour" is also said to be one of the weapons.

STREET FIGHTER X TEKKEN

It takes two to tangle

Pub **CAPCOM**
Dev **CAPCOM**
ETA **MARCH**

Why it's huge

This is a no brainer: Two of the biggest fighting franchises in history are teaming up for an unprecedented crossover, allowing for ass whoopings we never dreamt possible. That alone makes this game worth salivating over. But beyond the obvious, why *Street Fighter X Tekken* and not, say, *SoulCalibur V* or *Dead or Alive 5*? A few reasons. Number one: Yoshinori Ono, the man responsible for *Street Fighter IV* and, consequently, the unexpected revival of the entire fighting genre. With his passion and proven track record guiding the project, we have every reason to expect amazing results. More importantly, however, Street *Fighter X Cross Tekken* looks to introduce a few welcome new ideas, which brings us to...

What to expect

Though both franchises have traditionally focused on one-on-one combat, *Street Fighter X Tekken* revolves around two-character tag battles, and many of the game's mechanics have been custom built with this format in mind. Imagine swapping in a second character mid-combo to keep a juggle going or calling out both characters for simultaneous Supers—the strategic possibilities are practically exponential. The game also includes some daring experimental mechanics like customizable, stat-altering "gems" and Pandora mode, in which one character sacrifices his health to briefly empower the other.

What we want

Besides destroying Yoshimitsu with a Shoryuken? Balance. While the game admirably combines aspects of both franchises fighting styles, ensuring a fair fight for all these disparate characters is going to be a challenge, especially with the new gem system. Take your time tuning, Capcom. We'll wait—albeit, impatiently. ■

With Ono's passion and proven track record guiding the project, we have every reason to expect amazing results.

NINJA GAIDEN 3

Slice and dice and everything nice

Pub **TECMO KOEI**
Dev **TEAM NINJA**
ETA **SPRING**

Why it's huge

The *Ninja Gaiden* series' fans—and there are certainly many—often argue that no other game can hold a candle to its tight, expertly calibrated combat controls. But the next game in the series brings more than a few new things to the table as well, including stealth combat and a full-fledged multiplayer mode.

What to expect

The deft swordplay returns, of course, but with some new combat mechanics to boot. The Kunai Climb lets Ryu climb onto certain walls with the use of his kunai, which he can then use to attack enemies from above. Some situations will call for a more stealthy approach than Ryu has shown in titles past; he can now creep up on enemies and kill them with a single strike, and the slide maneuver lets Ryu attack enemies down low. Oh, and for the first time in *Ninja Gaiden* history, competitive multiplayer enters the fray, in the form of four-on-four online combat. Team Ninja has also announced that it is bringing PlayStation Move support to the series as well.

What we want

We want the game to do for Move what the previous titles in the series did for DualShock controls: namely, create the killer app, the perfectly calibrated virtual sword. Team Ninja says one of its major goals is to effectively simulate *dankotsu*, Japanese for "cutting through bone"; if it can do this with the sort of panache the series is known for, we're all in for a (very, very bloody) treat. ■

MASS EFFECT 3

A galaxy at war

Pub **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
Dev **BIOWARE**
ETA **MARCH**

Why it's huge

It's only the conclusion to the epic trilogy culminating in a final showdown with the Reapers. Earth has been taken, hundreds of thousands of innocent lives have been lost, and every living being faces annihilation. No big deal—just an average day in the life of Commander Shepard. When we take into account that every tough decision we've had to make through the course of the last two titles will somehow affect the events of the third game, we start to drown in a sea of "what ifs." Should we replay *Mass Effect 2* to ensure that every member or our crew is alive and well in *Mass Effect 3*? Would the universe have a better chance of survival if we had done things differently in the past? All we can be sure of is it's up to us to unite the forces of the galaxy and stop the Reapers once and for all.

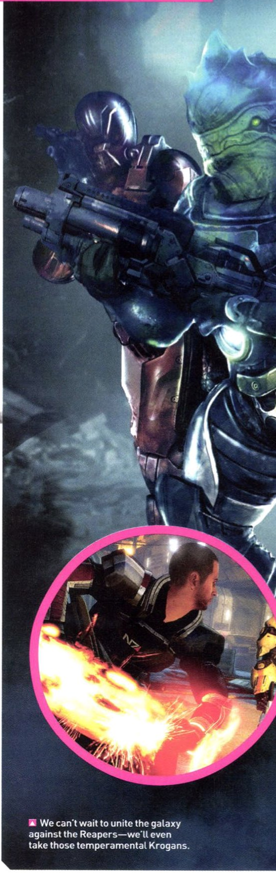
What to expect

While *Mass Effect 2* felt more like an action game than an RPG in comparison to the original, BioWare has promised a return of RPG-heavy features and a boatload of customization options. We can't wait to deck out Shepard and company as we recruit races from all over the galaxy to help us destroy the Reaper threat. However, the biggest addition to *Mass Effect 3* is its multiplayer component. Dubbed "Galaxy at War," this co-op only mode (a wise decision on BioWare's behalf) pits groups of players against waves of enemies as they capture strategic zones called theaters of operation. Based on our multiplayer successes and failures (in conjunction with our single-player performance), our Galactic Readiness meter will increase or decrease, affecting the final outcome of our solo campaign. We just hope this doesn't mean lone wolf players will miss out on anything if they decide to skip multiplayer altogether. With BioWare's commitment to crafting some of the finest single-player experiences on PS3, we can't imagine this to be the case.

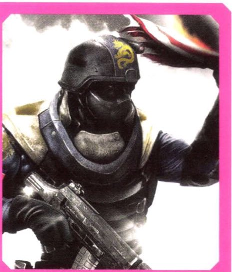
What we want

We want this epic finale to be just that: epic. If we're going to be running around the galaxy convincing entire races to join our cause, those alliances need to mean something. How awesome would it be to participate in large-scale battles or space skirmishes while commanding the entire anti-Reaper uprising? We want our decisions from the previous games to have far-reaching implications and unforeseen consequences. We want to be completely enveloped in this massive universe and feel like all of our struggles have led to something worthwhile. And when it comes to multiplayer, we *really* hope it's a fleshed out addition instead of a tacked-on afterthought. *Mass Effect* is a universe we've truly come to care about—and now that the Reapers threaten our very existence, we're ready to do what it takes to save the galaxy. After all, it's not going to save itself. ■

Earth has been taken, hundreds of thousands of innocent lives have been lost, and every living being faces annihilation. No big deal.



▲ **We can't wait to unite the galaxy against the Reapers—we'll even take those temperamental Krogans.**



Big in 2013

It's never too early to talk about next year's hugest games

Guillermo del Toro's InSane
PUB **THQ** DEV **Volition**
The Oscar-winning film director brings his haunting vision to the world of videogames.

Devil's Third
PUB **THQ** DEV **Valhalla**
The first project from former Team Ninja chief Tomonobu Itagaki's new development company.

Final Fantasy XIV Online
PUB/DEV **Square Enix**
Despite problems on PC, Square is intent on bringing a revamped *FF* MMO to PS3.

Homefront 2
PUB **THQ** DEV **Crytec UK**
FPS specialist Crytec is set to man the guns for this combat shooter's sequel.

DmC:
DEVIL MAY CRY

Reinventing the world's greatest demon hunter

Pub **CAPCOM**
Dev **NINJA THEORY**
ETA **TBD**

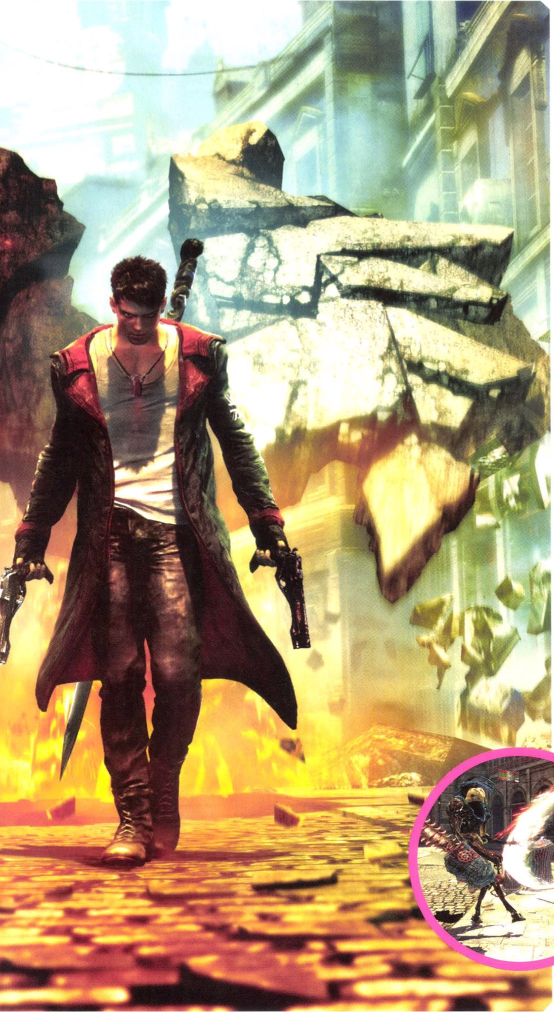
Why it's huge

Though it's the fifth entry in the *Devil May Cry* series, *DmC* is the first to be developed by a studio other than Capcom. The developers at Ninja Theory—creators of *Heavenly Sword* and *Enslaved: Odyssey to the West*—are revitalizing the storied demon-hunting franchise, and we couldn't be more excited. *DmC* is set in a parallel world to the original *Devil May Cry* and features a younger half-angel, half-demon Dante. Ninja Theory's reimagining of Dante's character has seen a largely negative public response, but we've grown accustomed to his new look...even if he does look a bit like someone straight out of *Jersey Shore*. Frankly, we don't really care what he looks like so long as the game is good.

What to expect

Capcom is overseeing *DmC*'s creative development to ensure it retains the elements that made the series successful in the first place: namely stylish, combo-driven combat. In the trailers released so far, Dante employs a variety of brutal weaponry, including a scythe, sword, and of course, his two trusty handguns, Ebony and Ivory. The game's flashy, fast-paced fighting style is reminiscent of the original *Devil May Cry* and is infused with a healthy dose of sustained aerial combos for a nice change of pace. To make things even more

The new Dante may not be the white-haired hero we're used to, but he's still enveloped in an aura of confidence and badassery.



interesting, the music in the game intensifies dependent on our combo chain; the longer we maintain our chain, the more layers of music are added to the backdrop as we slash and shoot our way through hordes of demons. The physical intensity of the gameplay and music are supplemented with an eye-popping color palette, too; distinct hues of reds, blues, and greens seemingly explode from the environment and its demonic inhabitants as Dante explores this living, breathing world.

What we want

The original *Devil May Cry* set high standards for the hack-and-slash action genre—but after two sequels and a prequel, the series could use a second wind. The new Dante may not be the white-haired hero we're used to, but he's still enveloped in an aura of confidence and badassery. Of course we desperately hope Ninja Theory can capture and maintain the series' renowned combat, but we're also hoping for a fresh focus on the game's setting. *DmC's* new "Limbo City" is billed as one that exists in a demonic dimension in contrast to the drab "real world"; the environment itself is a malevolent, living force that reacts to Dante's unwelcomed presence. Parts of the city shift and change as Dante passes by, and it spawns demons in effort to forever trap him within its hopeless confines. ■

◅ Dante's a man of few words; he lets his sword and guns do most of the talking.

The Next Big Thing

These new IPs could be 2012's surprise hits

Dishonored
PUB **Bethesda Softworks**
DEV **Arkane Studios**

A first-person action adventure where our actions influence the storyline.

Overstrike
PUB **Electronic Arts**
DEV **Insomniac Games**

Special Ops co-op from the makers of *Resistance* and *Ratchet & Clank*.

Ni no Kuni: Wrath of the White Witch
PUB **Namco Bandai**
DEV **Level-5**

Award-winning Japanese animation house Studio Ghibli supplies the visuals for this RPG.

Kingdoms of Amalur: Reckoning
PUB **Electronic Arts**
DEV **38 Studios/ Big Huge Games**

This open-world RPG seeks to infuse more action-oriented combat into its adventure.

STARHAWK

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **LIGHTBOX INT.**
ETA **TBD**

Warring in the final frontier

Why it's huge

As the spiritual successor to 2007's *Warhawk*, *Starhawk* is a sci-fi third-person shooter that promises refined over-the-shoulder combat and intense 32-player multiplayer matches. But there's one big reason we're excited for its debut: buildings. More specifically, we're eager to play with the game's "Build and Battle" system, which fuses real-time strategy mechanics into the gameplay.

No, we're not talking about tediously micro-managing resources and troops—instead, we spend the rift energy obtained through killing enemies on producing structures like walls, bunkers, and other buildings, thereby constantly transforming the battlefield.

The best part of this new mechanic? If we can time our deployment just right, our shiny new military installations will be delivered via orbital drop right on top of our opponents. Now *that's* a crushing defeat.

What to expect

Unlike its predecessor, *Starhawk* features a single-player campaign that introduces its sci-fi setting. However, multiplayer is the game's biggest draw. In addition to the aforementioned RTS mechanics, the game's run-and-gun shooting and vehicular combat make for a well-rounded package. From tanks to Warhawks—agile aircraft that can transform into deadly mechs—there are tons of options for destroying the competition.

What we want

Streamlining RTS elements into a third-person shooter is a brilliant idea. If the developers successfully nail the formula, we're in for multiplayer experience unlike anything else out there; one in which every battle unfolds in a unique, unexpected way as players place defensive structures on-the-fly and destroy them just as quickly. We're hoping for a deep layer of strategy—but either way, there are bound to plenty of things to blow up. ■

The game's run-and-gun shooting and vehicular combat make for a well-rounded package.

MAX PAYNE 3

Pain isn't always temporary

Pub **ROCKSTAR**
Dev **ROCKSTAR VANCOUVER**
ETA **MARCH**

Why it's huge

Fans of gaming's most emotionally wounded hero have pondered his whereabouts since the grim ending of 2003's *Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne*—and following nearly nine years of silence, he's finally emerged. Rockstar Games is coming off one of the greatest streaks in recent gaming history, including *Grand Theft Auto IV*, *Red Dead Redemption*, and *L.A. Noire*, and *Max Payne 3* seems strongly primed to continue that trend by building upon the franchise's defining elements and taking the former NYPD detective to even darker places.

What to expect

Rockstar's latest finds Payne further beaten down by the harsh reality of time, the toll of past exploits, and his regular intake of booze and pills. While the game briefly shows him in New York, much of the campaign takes place in São Paulo, Brazil, where Payne shaves his head and takes a gig protecting a wealthy family. Based on what we've seen so far, *Max Payne 3* expands upon the series' once-influential bullet-time mechanic and delivers startlingly refined combat and character animations—not to mention multiplayer, a first for the franchise.

What we want

Max Payne 3 needs to marry everything we loved about the past entries—notably the pulse-pounding gunplay and dark storytelling—with modern tech and Rockstar's one-of-a-kind flair for astonishingly polished, cinematic adventures. Thankfully, the game seems well on its way to both appeasing fans and redefining the character for today's times, and the release is just around the corner. ■

BORDERLANDS 2

Taking it to the limit

Why it's huge

The original *Borderlands* won a special place in our hearts with its lighthearted mayhem, exceptional four-player co-op, and randomly generated weaponry (gun porn FTW). Yet the game contained obvious potential beyond the experience it offered. We chatted with lead writer Anthony Burch and concept designer Scott Kester about how that potential is being realized in *Borderlands 2*.

Here we are, still on Pandora five years later...with four new lead characters. Why the change?

Kester: We knew going into this game it was important that we were going to give the players a new experience and new personalities to play as, but we also knew people grew pretty attached to those guys. It was a hard decision moving away from those characters, but we knew that using them as NPCs would add a little more validity and be a cool jumping-off point.

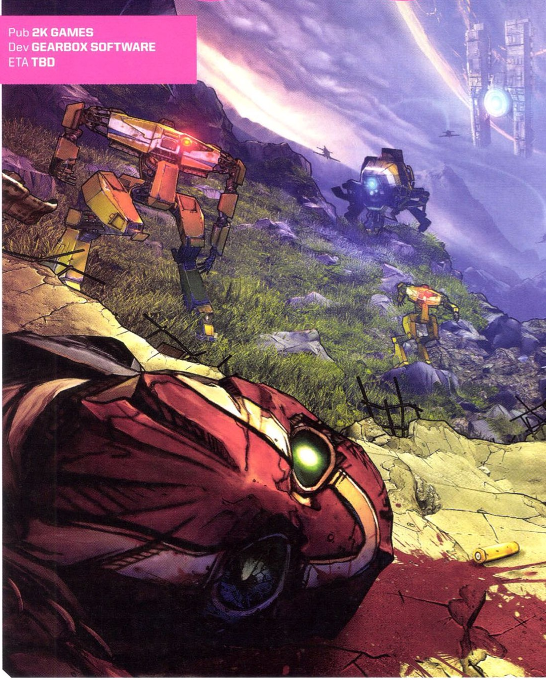
So we'll still interact with the original foursome?

Burch: They are extremely central to the plot. The antagonist, Handsome Jack, is a fearsome foe in terms of the control he has on Pandora and what he's trying to do and the army of Hyperion bots and engineers he has on his side, basically fighting for him to try to tame the Borderlands and make it his own perfect utopia of fascism and all that stuff. He's an imposing enough foe that you're going to need their help to take him down.

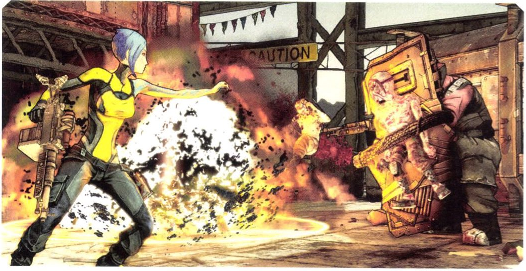
What can you tell us about the new protagonists?

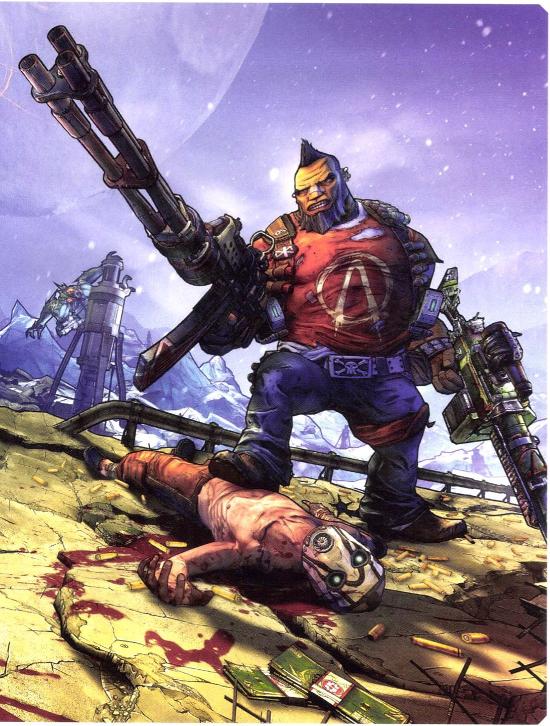
Kester: We want to make sure there are characters that are created for different people's playstyles. [The lead character's are] a little more varied, perhaps. We could give them some new abilities and some different things so you could interact inside the world a little different than you did last time. We've really only shown about two of the classes of the new game, the first being Salvador—the Gunzerker with the dual-wielding ability—and a new Siren called Maya, who we haven't really gotten into who she is and what her abilities are.

Borderlands 2 lead writer Anthony Burch and concept designer Scott Kester.



Pub **2K GAMES**
Dev **GEARBOX SOFTWARE**
ETA **TBD**





"Are we a shooter/looter? How RPG are we? It's about finding this balance once again going into a sequel."

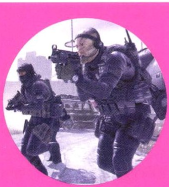
Does story play a bigger role this time around?
Burch: Unquestionably, yeah. This is a game first, but there is definitely way, way, way more focus on integrating the story with the quests and with the mechanics themselves. It's not just going to be, "Read a block of text, finish a mission, and read another block of text that tells what that all meant." You're going to have the Vault Hunters constantly telling you what to do next and what the situation is. You're going to have Handsome Jack heckling you the entire game, making you want to put a bullet in his head even more, hopefully.

So the game is fully voiced?
Burch: Yeah, there's a metric butt-ton of voice acting that has been recorded.

Does Claptrap return?
Burch: He's a little more intertwined with the main story. Claptrap has his own reasons for wanting Hyperion dead. Basically, Hyperion ordered the destruction of his entire product line. So the Claptrap you know and love is the only Claptrap left in existence, and he wants to wage his revenge against Hyperion for exterminating his entire product line and he wants you to help him do it.

Is this still a "roleplaying shooter"?
Kester: There's a lot more depth to how you can build your character, but it's been a very hard line for us to walk because of this. Are we a shooter/looter? How RPG are we? It's about finding this balance once again going into a sequel. It was a really hard question we had to ask in the first one, and we thought we had a really great balance so we're just trying to improve on both sides of that.

Can we still expect a bazillion different guns?
Kester: Yeah, I mean we have more gear and loot and things you can pick up, but the guns are definitely kind of the star of our show. We revamped the system, put even more variables in it, redesigned the looks, and rebuilt every single gun. If anybody was a fan of that before they're going to be even more so now. ■



Unconfirmed

Unannounced games we're (mostly) certain are in the works

God of War IV

PUB **SCEA**
DEV **Santa Monica Studio**

Kratos seems certain to return, and the early buzz indicates a multiplayer mode.

Mirror's Edge 2

PUB **Electronic Arts**
DEV **DICE**

We have "Faith" in the innovative parkour action that didn't live up to its potential last time.

Assassin's Creed III

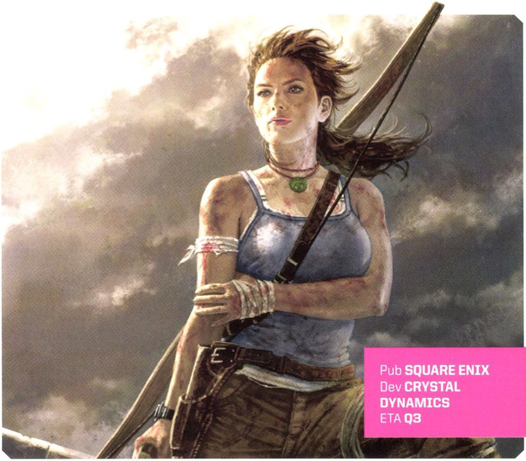
PUB **Ubisoft**
DEV **Ubisoft Montreal**

We don't know where the path will lead, but an all-new franchise installment is welcome.

Call of Duty

PUB **Activision**
DEV **Treyarch**

We want to know what war we'll be fighting next. Rumors suggest a future war theme.



Pub **SQUARE ENIX**
Dev **CRYSTAL DYNAMICS**
ETA **Q3**

TOMB RAIDER

Raiders of the lost art

Why it's huge

Few videogame characters are as well known as Lara Croft. But if this newest iteration of the *Tomb Raider* franchise is anything to go by, we still have a lot to learn; Crystal Dynamics has gone back to the drawing board to reinvent the character for a new generation, and the results are looking rather spectacular. "Dark and edgy" doesn't always work, but this time it feels like a perfect fit.

What to expect

Lara Croft has never been vulnerable, but now she most certainly is: Her 21-year-old self is fresh out of school and ambitiously in search of lost relics. Unfortunately, the ship she's traveling on is torn in two by an unforeseen storm, leaving her and its captain Conrad Roth to fend for themselves on an island right out of *Lost*. While much of the gameplay experience is a real-deal third-person shooter (no auto-aim this time), Lara's other survival instincts will be equally important: specific physical abilities are achieved via a skill system, or through acquisition of the necessary equipment. Puzzles revolve around realistic reproductions of fire, water, wind and friction, and the rather treacherous physics that come with them.

What we want

Nothing less than Lara's spiritual rebirth. What we've seen thus far is equal parts *Uncharted*, *Heavy Rain*, and *Portal*; if the developer can successfully sew these disparate elements together and wrap them into a tale with narrative teeth, it may have one of the year's very best games on its hands. ■

Crystal Dynamics has gone back to the drawing board to reinvent the character for a new generation.

LOLLIPOP CHAINSAW

Only one is for licking

Pub **WARNER BROS. INT. ENT.**
Dev **GRASSHOPPER MANUFACTURE**
ETA **TBD**

Why it's huge

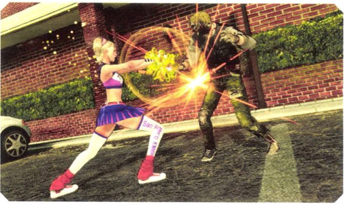
Grasshopper Manufacture creative director Goichi Suda (a.k.a. Suda51) has long been known for developing truly "out there" games—see PS2's *Killer7*—but lately, his creations have skewed more accessible while remaining conceptually outlandish. For example, 2011's *Shadows of the Damned* sublimely paired *Resident Evil 4*-like action with blue humor and sexual overtones, and now Suda looks to bring his skewed perspective to the zombie-slaying genre with *Lollipop Chainsaw*, which stars a cheerleader cutting up the undead in a defiled high school. As with *Shadows*, it's bound to be one of the most distinctive releases of the year.

What to expect

Juliet Starling usually roots for her school's team, but now she's on the side of the whole human race, wielding a chainsaw to dominate and decapitate zombies en masse. With a candy-coated look, dicey language, and all sorts of suggestive imagery, *Lollipop Chainsaw* delivers a very different take on what's becoming a stagnant game concept—and between the quirky setting and ultra-violent melee combat, it looks like the interactive version of a trashy horror b-movie. Expect laughs, thrills, and probably a few head-shaking moments along the way.

What we want

Lollipop Chainsaw represents Suda51's best opportunity to date to deliver his odd aesthetic to a wider audience (thanks to the genre's popularity), so we hope he doesn't compromise his vision in the process. Luckily, between the laughably gory action, zombie rocker foes, and Juliet's boyfriend—a talking, disembodied head—it's doubtful we have anything to worry about there. ■



San Romero
KNIGHTS

TWISTED METAL

It sure beats the hell out of commuting

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **EAT SLEEP PLAY**
ETA **FEBRUARY**

Why it's huge

The original *Twisted Metal* was one of the games that defined PSone, and the upcoming reboot may very well do the same on PS3. The game began life as a downloadable PSN title, and then morphed into a multiplayer-only disc, and then finally into a full retail title, complete with single-player campaign—each time at Sony's request, upon being wowed by what they saw. Despite the original's enormous success, today's gaming landscape is still generally devoid of arena car combat titles; strange, given the fact that we gamers seem to love both driving and shooting. And with the technology having changed so significantly—both in terms of graphical horsepower and ubiquity of high-speed Internet connections—there's never been a better time than now for the face of vehicular homicide to make its violent (and welcomed) return.

Each vehicle in the game now functions independently of its driver.

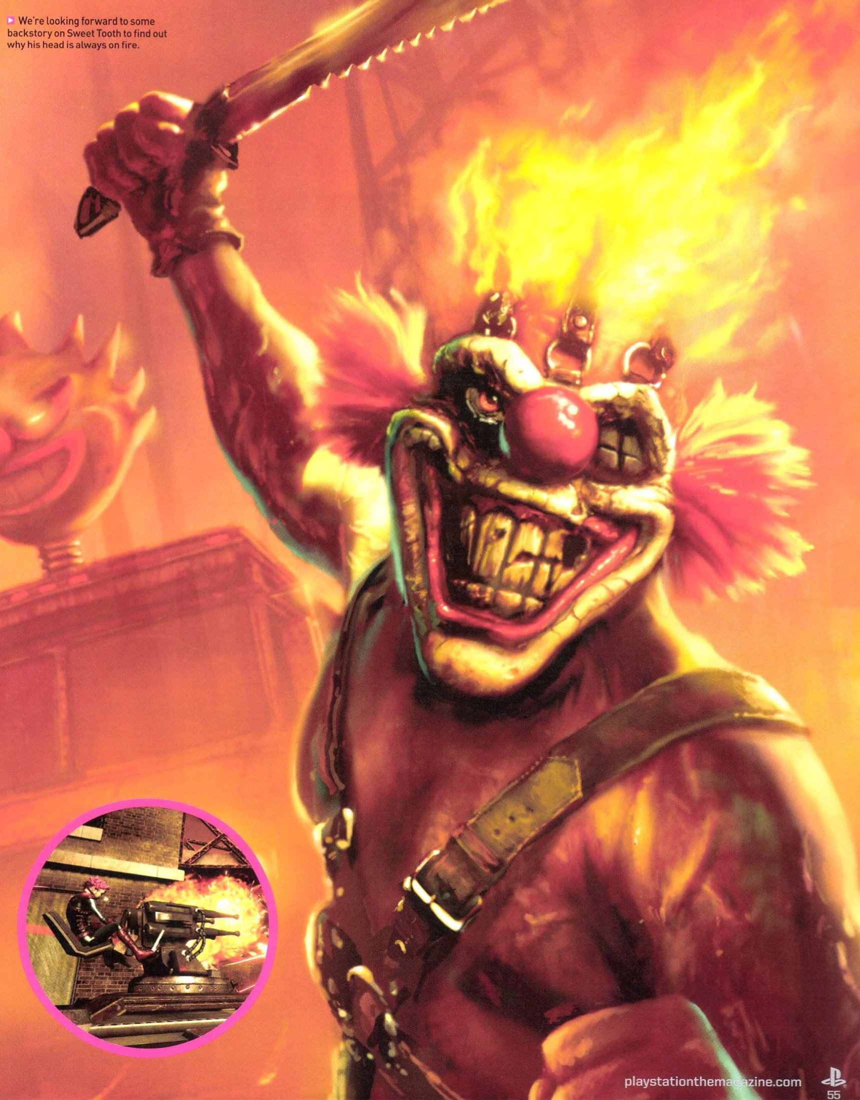
What to expect

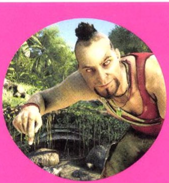
The game is focused heavily on multiplayer: four players via splitscreen, and 16 players online. Unlike the highly competitive (and rather insular) online components of games like *Modern Warfare* and *Battlefield*, however, *Twisted Metal* is built to be accessible for newcomers; game designer David Jaffe has attempted to create a game that he himself would be able to play competitively online, without hundreds of hours of practice. One mode in particular that has wowed us thus far is called Nuke. Essentially, we must destroy the opposing faction's giant metal statue before they destroy ours, which is accomplished by abducting the enemy team's leader and then sacrificing said leader to a missile launcher—that will, in turn, launch a nuclear missile. Each vehicle in the game now functions independently of its driver, and can be driven by any character. Jaffe is one of the industry's most outspoken figures, with the entire *Twisted Metal* series and the original *God of War* under his belt: There's a lot riding on this one, and he knows it.

What we want

First-person shooters are great, but we'd love to play something else that truly captures the online zeitgeist. If *Twisted Metal* can bring coordinated multiplayer to new heights as promised, we see no reason why it can't be the one to do it. Take, for example, a tractor-trailer semi known as the Juggernaut: Not only can it drop rolling explosive mines from the sides of its trailer, but it can also house two human teammates, who are then assigned to its two onboard machinegun turrets. This makes it versatile, capable of being used as an escort vehicle, a transport vehicle, or hell on wheels. Talon, likewise, has a first-person turret that can rain destruction upon unsuspecting land-dwellers, while its onboard magnet that can pick up vehicles and transport friendlies to other parts of the battlefield—or drop enemy units from the sky. Oh, and what we've seen of the game's cutscenes looks great so far: The unflinchingly dark, well-told backstories of the game's creepy contestants should bring an extra dose of motivation to the single-player proceedings. More like this, please. ■

▶ We're looking forward to some backstory on Sweet Tooth to find out why his head is always on fire.





Near Misses

Big games that just missed making our list

Far Cry 3

PUB **Ubisoft** DEV **Ubisoft Montreal**

A mysterious tropical island filled with psychotic villains—not the ideal vacation destination.

Aliens: Colonial Marines

PUB **Sega** DEV **Gearbox Software**

Xenomorphs and space marines. It's all we ever really wanted in an *Aliens* game, isn't it?

Prey 2

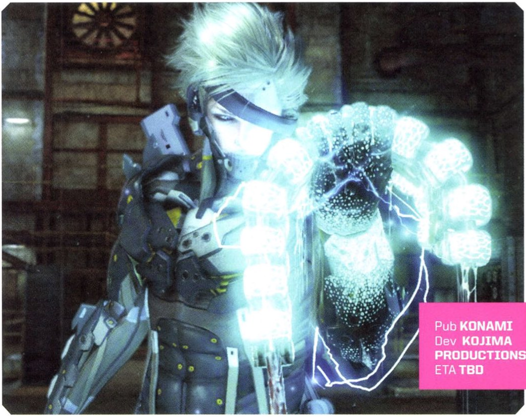
PUB **Bethesda Softworks**
DEV **Human Head Studios**

First-person open-world bounty hunting on an alien planet. Where do we sign up?

Sly Cooper: Thieves in Time

PUB **SCEA**
DEV **Sanzaru Games**

The beloved PS2 stealth platformer franchise comes to PS3.



Pub **KONAMI**
Dev **KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS**
ETA **TBD**

METAL GEAR SOLID: RISING

Ready to rise from the shadows

Why it's huge

Known for its ever-enhanced stealth action, fabulous aesthetics, and quirky sense of humor, *Metal Gear Solid* is one of the best-loved franchises in the gaming world—and despite appearances elsewhere, the series still feels like a crown jewel in the PlayStation arsenal. *Metal Gear Solid: Rising* shifts gears with a more action-oriented approach and stars Raiden, the cyborg ninja from *MGS4: Guns of the Patriots*. While that changes the feel of the game, franchise fans are still foaming at the mouth for a fresh *Metal Gear* experience.

What to expect

Instead of "Tactical Espionage Action"—the official descriptor for the franchise—*Rising* boasts "Lighting Bolt Action," which pertains to Raiden's electric-infused cybernetic body and the fast-paced hack-'n'-slash combat that defines this new entry. Set between his surprise debut in *Metal Gear Solid 2* and badass revival in *MGS4*, *Rising* details exactly how this character underwent such a dramatic transformation—with slick in-game visuals and stylized cinematics.

What we want

The prospect of *Ninja Gaiden*-like combat mixed with *Metal Gear*'s trademark style and swagger sends our hearts aflutter, but with wickedly precise cutting mechanics—which let us slice up bodies, vehicles, and buildings into bits—*Rising* may well set a new standard for speedy swordplay. And we're excited to see how the optional nonlethal takedowns and ability to use parts from fallen foes shakes up the typical action approach. *Metal Gear Solid* is one of the safest bets in gaming, and we expect *Rising* to live up to its storied namesake. ■

Metal Gear Solid: Rising shifts gears with a more action-oriented approach and stars Raiden.

THE LAST GUARDIAN

The last year we wait?

Why it's huge

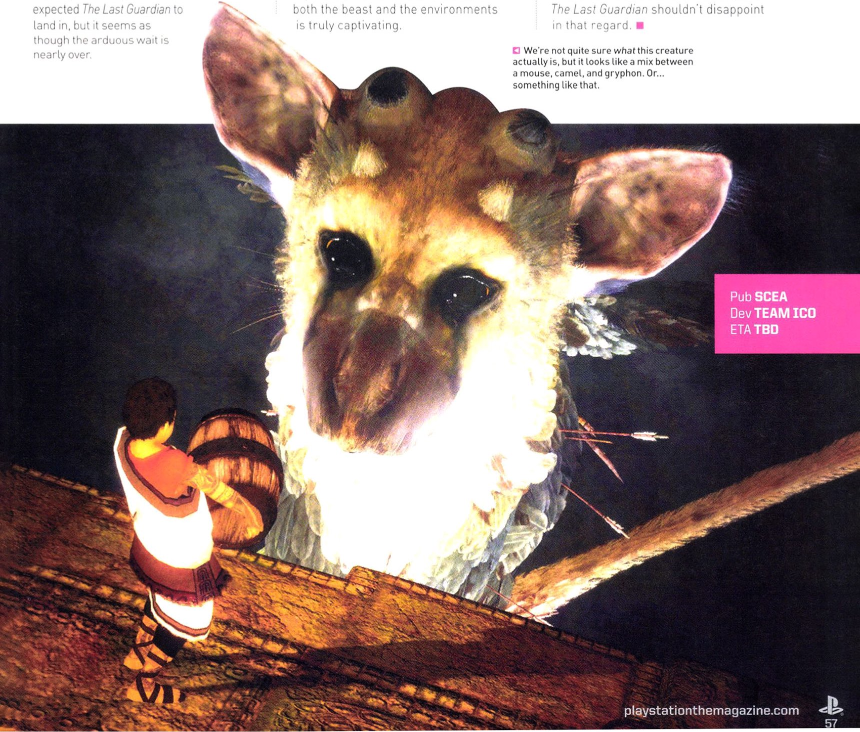
While they're not mainstream smashes, *Ico* and *Shadow of the Colossus*—recently re-released as an HD two-pack on PS3—captured the hearts and minds of PS2 owners years ago. *The Last Guardian* is a spiritual successor to those beloved adventures, and promises to deliver the same kind of touching, atmospheric experience that only Team Ico can execute. Following multiple delays since its original 2009 announcement, this is actually the third year we've expected *The Last Guardian* to land in, but it seems as though the arduous wait is nearly over.

What to expect

Like Team Ico's previous games, *The Last Guardian* spotlights a relationship between two beings—in this case, a young boy and a gargantuan, winged beast. The two must work together to solve puzzle-centric platform challenges set within a fantasy world, and it's up to us to actively command the boy and interact with (and even ride) the creature to complete various objectives. And the level of detail on both the beast and the environments is truly captivating.

What we want

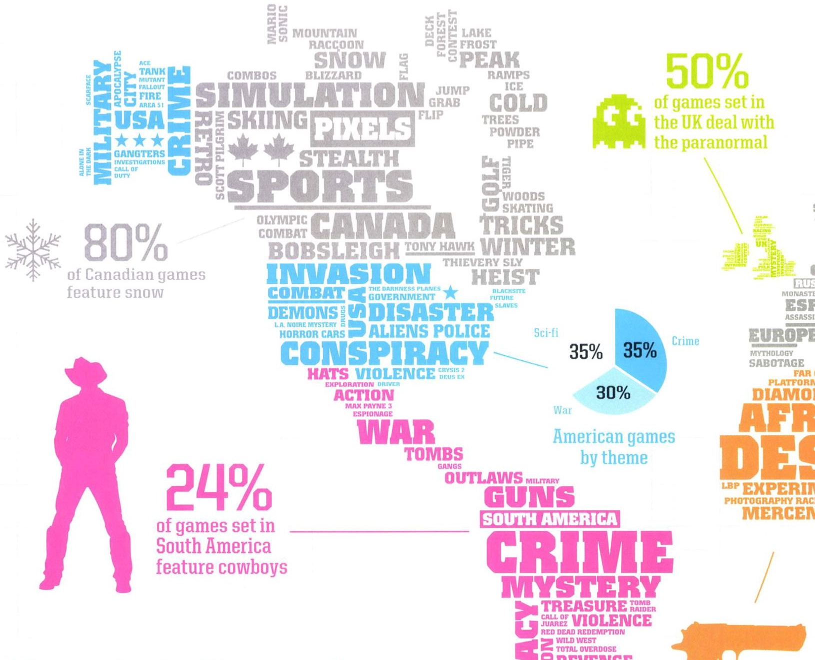
As in *Shadow of the Colossus*, we're seeking an experience that feels both personal and intimate while depicting a grand adventure. And to be quite honest, we anticipate some sort of emotionally devastating outcome—albeit, the life-affirming kind that reminds us that videogames can be about more than just quick-hit fun or violent shootouts. Team Ico typically offers us that kind of affirmation, and *The Last Guardian* shouldn't disappoint in that regard. ■



We're not quite sure *what* this creature actually is, but it looks like a mix between a mouse, camel, and gryphon. Or... something like that.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **TEAM ICO**
ETA **TBD**

AROUND THE WORLD


MARIO
SONIC
MOUNTAIN
RACCOON
SNOW
FLAG
DECK
FOREST
CONTEST
LAKE
FROST
PEAK
RAMPS
ICE
COLD
TREES
POWDER
PIPE
SCARFACE
MILITARY
ALONE IN THE DARK
APOCALYPSE
CITY
ACE
TANK
MUTANT
FALLOUT
FIRE
AREA 51
USA
★ ★ ★
GANGTERS
INVESTIGATIONS
CALL OF DUTY
CRIME
RETRO
SCOTT PILGRIM
COMBOS
BLIZZARD
SIMULATION
JUMP
GRAB
FLIP
SKIING
PIXELS
STEALTH
SPORTS
GOLF
TIGER
WOODS
SKATING
OLYMPIC
COMBAT
CANADA
TRICKS
BOBSLEIGH
TONY HAWK
WINTER
THIEVERY SLY
HEIST
INVASION
COMBAT
USA
THE DARKNESS PLANES
GOVERNMENT
★
BLACKSITE
FUTURE
SLAVES
DEMONS
DRUGS
DISASTER
L.A. NOIRE MYSTERY
HORROR CARS
ALIENS POLICE
CONSPIRACY
HATS
VIOLENCE
CRYSIS 2
DEUS EX
EXPLORATION
DRIVER
ACTION
MAX PAYNE 3
ESPIONAGE
WAR
TOMBS
GANGS
OUTLAWS
MILITARY
GUNS
SOUTH AMERICA
CRIME
MYSTERY
RACING
UK
FANTASY
INTRIGUE
CONTEST
MYSTERY
FOLK
CONSPIRACY
INVASION
RUS
MONASTE
ESP
ASSASSI
EUROPE
MYTHOLOGY
SABOTAGE
FAR
PLATFORM
DIAMON
AFR
DES
LBP
EXPERIN
PHOTOGRAPHY RAC
MERCEN
Sci-fi
35%
35%
Crime
30%
War

80%
of Canadian games feature snow

50%
of games set in the UK deal with the paranormal

American games by theme

24%
of games set in South America feature cowboys

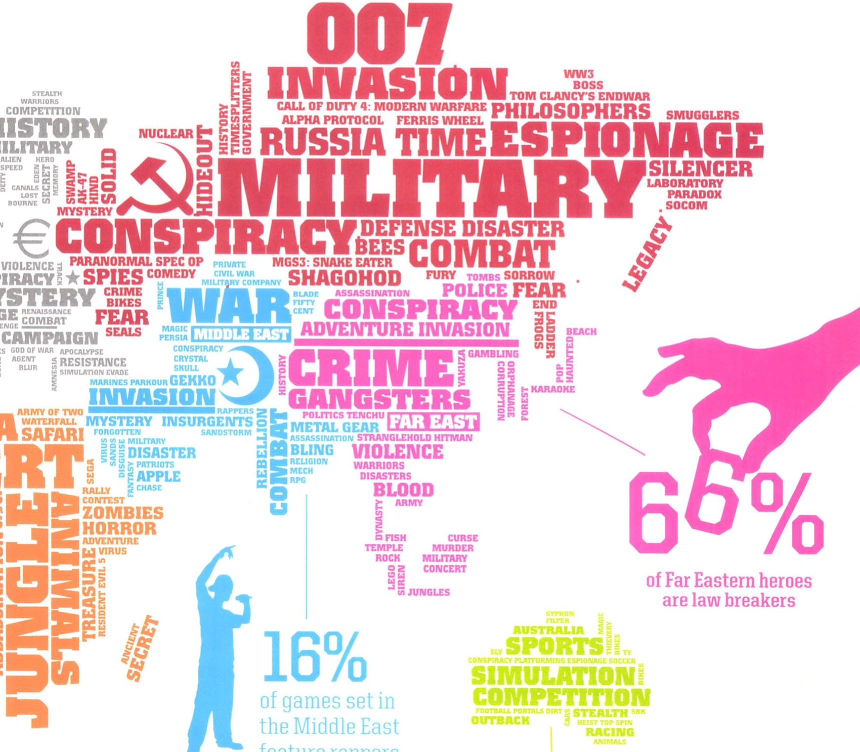
Five continents, 96 games—this is the world according to PlayStation

You'd be forgiven for thinking most games are set in New York City. Check the stats, though, and you'll be surprised. Developers have based their games in pretty much every corner of the globe, from Canada to outback Australia. But what's interesting is how games portray different regions, often in terms of crass stereotypes. Using quasi-science—see page 61 for an explanation—we've broken down the five major continents (we've excluded Antarctica) into the games that define them, plus their key themes. Take a look.

TREASURE
TOMB RAIDER
CALL OF JUAREZ
VIOLENCE
RED DEAD REDEMPTION
WILD WEST
TOTAL OVERDOSE
REVENGE
PEACE WALKER
CONFLICT
BATTLE FIELD
INVASION
CONSPIRACY
COMBAT
UNCHARTED

71%
of games set in Africa are violent

IN 96 GAMES


007
INVASION
HISTORY
TIMESPLITTERS
GOVERNMENT
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
ALPHA PROTOCOL
FERRIS WHEEL
WW3
BOSS
TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR
PHILOSOPHERS
SMUGGLERS
NUCLEAR
HIDEOUT
RUSSIA
TIME
ESPIONAGE
MILITARY
SILENCER
LABORATORY
PARADOX
SOCOM
LEGACY
STEALTH
WARRIORS
COMPETITION
ISTORY
ILITARY
ALIEN
HERO
SPEED
DEITY
EDEN
SECRET
MEMORY
CANALS
LOST
BOURNE
SWAMP
AK-47
HIND
SOLID
MYSTERY
CONSPIRACY
DEFENSE DISASTER
BEES
COMBAT
VIOLENCE
TRACK
PIRACY
YSTERY
GE
RENAISSANCE
COMBAT
ENGE
CAMPAIGN
S
GOD OF WAR
AGENT
BLUR
AMNESIA
APOCALYPSE
RESISTANCE
SIMULATION EVADE
PARANORMAL
SPEC OP
SPIES
COMEDY
CRIME
BIKES
FEAR
SEALS
PRIVATE
CIVIL WAR
MILITARY COMPANY
PRINCE
WAR
MAGIC
PERSIA
MIDDLE EAST
CONSPIRACY
CRYSTAL
SKULL
MARINES
PARKOUR
GEKKO
INVASION
RAPPERS
MYSTERY
INSURGENTS
SANDSTORM
FORGOTTEN
VIRUS
SANDS
DISGUISE
FANTASY
MILITARY
DISASTER
PATRIOTS
APPLE
CHASE
REBELLION
COMBAT
HISTORY
MGS3: SNAKE EATER
SHAGOHOD
FURY
TOMBS
SORROW
BLADE
FIFTY
CENT
ASSASSINATION
POLICE
FEAR
CONSPIRACY
ADVENTURE INVASION
END
FROGS
LADDER
BEACH
CRIME
YAKUZA
GAMBLING
ORPHANAGE
CORRUPTION
POP
HAUNTED
FOREST
KARAOKE
GANGSTERS
POLITICS
TENCHU
FAR EAST
METAL GEAR
ASSASSINATION
STRANGLEHOLD
HITMAN
BLING
RELIGION
MECH
RPG
VIOLENCE
WARRIORS
DISASTERS
BLOOD
ARMY
DYNASTY
FISH
TEMPLE
ROCK
LEGO
SIREN
JUNGLES
CURSE
MURDER
MILITARY
CONCERT
A
ARMY OF TWO
WATERFALL
SAFARI
RT
JUNGLE
ANIMALS
SEGA
RALLY
CONTEST
ZOMBIES
HORROR
ADVENTURE
TREASURE
VIRUS
RESIDENT EVIL 5
ANCIENT
SECRET
SYPHON
FILTER
AUSTRALIA
MAGIC
THIEVERY
SLY
SPORTS
BIKES
TY
CONSPIRACY PLATFORMING ESPIONAGE SOCCER
SIMULATION
BIKES
COMPETITION
FOOTBALL PORTALS DIRT
CARS
STEALTH
SBK
OUTBACK
HEIST TOP SPIN
RACING
ANIMALS

66%

of Far Eastern heroes are law breakers

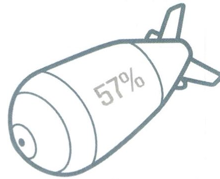
16%

of games set in the Middle East feature rappers

14%

of games set in Australia feature Koala Bears

UK, IRELAND, AND EUROPE



of games set in Europe are war games

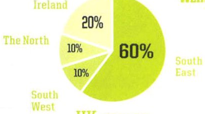
Games set in UK and Ireland

- Alice: Madness Returns (London)
- Broken Sword: The SD (Glastonbury)
- The Da Vinci Code (London)
- DiRT 2 (London)
- Folklore (Ireland)
- The Getaway (London)
- IL-2 Sturmovik (Dover)
- Need for Speed: Shift (Kent)
- Resistance: Fall Of Man (Cheddar Gorge)
- Tomb Raider Chronicles (Ireland)

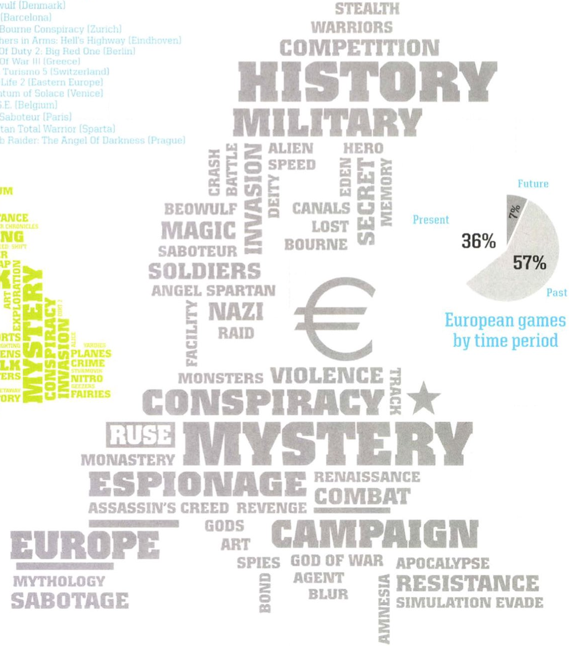
Games set in Europe

- Assassin's Creed II (Italy)
- Beowulf (Denmark)
- Blur (Barcelona)
- The Bourne Conspiracy (Zurich)
- Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway (Eindhoven)
- Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One (Berlin)
- God Of War III (Greece)
- Gran Turismo 5 (Switzerland)
- Half-Life 2 (Eastern Europe)
- Quantum of Solace (Venice)
- R.U.S.E. (Belgium)
- The Saboteur (Paris)
- Spartan Total Warrior (Sparta)
- Tomb Raider: The Angel Of Darkness (Prague)

ASYLUM
BOMBING
CARS
RESISTANCE
TOMB RAIDER CHRONICLES
RACING
NEED FOR SPEED: SHIFT
MURDER
KIDNAP
UK
DREAM
LAP
QUESTS
MUD
IRELAND
AIR COMBAT
MONSTERS
LORE
FANTASY
PARANORMAL
CONTEST
BROKEN SWORD
INTRIGUE
DEFENCE
TRACK
ART
EXPLORATION
SPORTS
FIGHTING
ALIENS
CHAOS
FOLK
GANGSTERS
THE GETAWAY
HISTORY
WEIRD
MYSTERY
CONSPIRACY
DIRT 2
INVASION
ALICE
YARDIES
PLANES
CRIME
STURMOVIK
NITRO
GEEZERS
FAIRIES



UK games by region


STEALTH
WARRIORS
COMPETITION
HISTORY
MILITARY
CRASH
BATTLE
INVASION
DEITY
ALIEN
SPEED
HERO
EDEN
SECRET
MEMORY
BEOWULF
MAGIC
SABOTEUR
CANALS
LOST
BOURNE
SOLDIERS
ANGEL
SPARTAN
FACILITY
NAZI
RAID
€
MONSTERS
VIOLENCE
TRACK
CONSPIRACY
★
RUSE
MYSTERY
MONASTERY
ESPIONAGE
RENAISSANCE
COMBAT
ASSASSIN'S CREED
REVENGE
GODS
ART
CAMPAIGN
EUROPE
MYTHOLOGY
SABOTAGE
SPIES
BOND
GOD OF WAR
AGENT
BLUR
AMNESIA
APOCALYPSE
RESISTANCE
SIMULATION
EVADE
Future
7%
Present
36%
57%
Past

European games by time period

40% of UK games are set in London

74% Average Metacritic score for games set in Europe

EASTERN EUROPE AND ASIA

Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare

Where is it set? Pripyat

Keywords war, military, combat, disaster

Description The abandoned city of Pripyat, Ukraine, is the setting for some of *Modern Warfare's* best missions.

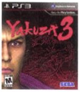
Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

Where is it set? Groznyj Grad

Keywords espionage, conspiracy, government, stealth

Description You don't normally associate Russia with jungles and swamps. *Snake Eater* saw Big Boss sneaking through both.

007
INVASION
WW3
BOSS
TOM CLANCY'S ENDWAR
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE
PHILOSOPHERS
ALPHA PROTOCOL
FERRIS WHEEL
SMUGGLERS
HISTORY
TIMESPLITTERS
GOVERNMENT
NUCLEAR
RUSSIA
TIME
ESPIONAGE
HIDEOUT
SWAMP
AK-47
HIND
SOLID
MILITARY
SILENCER
LABORATORY
PARADOX
SOCOM
MYSTERY
CONSPIRACY
DEFENSE
DISASTER
BEES
COMBAT
LEGACY
PARANORMAL
SPEC OP
PRIVATE CIVIL WAR MILITARY COMPANY
MGS3: SNAKE EATER
SPIES
COMEDY
SHAGOHOD
FURY
TOMBS
SORROW
CRIME
BIKES
FEAR
SEALS
PRINCE
WAR
BLADE
FIFTY CENT
ASSASSINATION
POLICE
FEAR
CONSPIRACY
END
LADDER
FROGS
BEACH
MAGIC
PERSIA
MIDDLE EAST
ADVENTURE
INVASION
CONSPIRACY
CRYSTAL SKULL
HISTORY
CRIME
YAKUZA
GAMBLING
ORPHANAGE
CORRUPTION
POP
HAUNTED
KARAOKE
FOREST
MARINES
PARKOUR
GEKKO
INVASION
GANGSTERS
RAPPERS
MYSTERY
INSURGENTS
SANDSTORM
REBELLION
COMBAT
POLITICS
TENCHU
FAR EAST
FORGOTTEN
METAL GEAR
VIRUS
SANDS
DISGUISE
MILITARY
DISASTER
ASSASSINATION
STRANGLEHOLD
HITMAN
FANTASY
PATRIOTS
APPLE
CHASE
BLING
RELIGION
MECH
RPG
VIOLENCE
WARRIORS
DISASTERS
BLOOD
ARMY
DYNASTY
FISH
TEMPLE
ROCK
LEGO
SIREN
CURSE
MURDER
MILITARY
CONCERT
JUNGLES

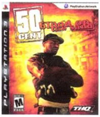


Yakuza 3

Where is it set? Okinawa

Keywords crime, politics, gangsters, violence

Description As Kazuma Kiryu, you must protect the gorgeous little island of Okinawa from greedy politician scum.

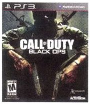


50 Cent: Blood on the Sand

Where is it set? Unnamed

Keywords war, invasion, combat, rappers

Description Fiddy is paid with a diamond skull for a Middle East gig, but a gangster steals it. He's not comfortable with that.



Call of Duty: Black Ops

Where is it set? Vietnam

Keywords war, invasion, conspiracy, military

Description Some of *Black Ops'* best—and worst—levels are set during the Vietnam War.

How we figured it all out (The "science")

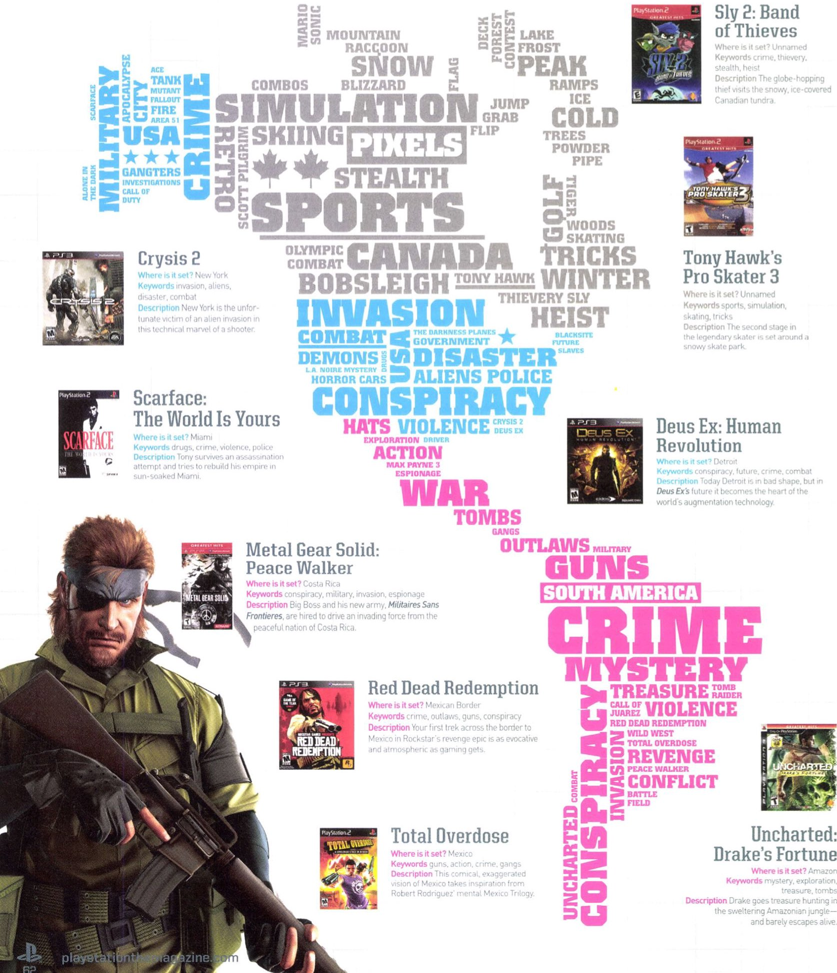
01 First we selected the most populated areas of the world, then listed a selection of games set in each location from PSone, PS2, and PS3.

02 Then we broke every game down into four keywords from a set "menu" of themes (e.g. war, military, gangster, rappers, sports, etc.)

03 The keywords act as data for a "word cloud." Words that feature more than others (e.g. "war" in the Middle East) appear bigger.

04 Finally, we used the data and keywords to figure out the biggest, most common themes and trends, as well as other fun stats.

USA, CANADA, AND SOUTH AMERICA


MARIO
SONIC
MOUNTAIN
RACCOON
SNOW
FLAG
DECK
FOREST
CONTEST
LAKE
FROST
PEAK
RAMPS
ICE
COLD
SCARFACE
ALONE IN THE DARK
MILITARY
APOCALYPSE
CITY
ACE
TANK
MUTANT
FALLOUT
FIRE
AREA 51
USA
★ ★ ★
GANGTERS
INVESTIGATIONS
CALL OF DUTY
CRIME
RETRO
SCOTT PILGRIM
COMBOS
BLIZZARD
SIMULATION
JUMP
GRAB
FLIP
SKIING
PIXELS
TREES
POWDER
PIPE
STEALTH
SPORTS
GOLF
TIGER
WOODS
SKATING
OLYMPIC
COMBAT
CANADA
TRICKS
BOBSLEIGH
TONY HAWK
WINTER
THIEVERY SLY
HEIST
INVASION
COMBAT
USA
THE DARKNESS PLANES
GOVERNMENT
★
BLACKSITE
FUTURE
SLAVES
DEMONS
DRUGS
DISASTER
L.A. NOIRE MYSTERY
HORROR CARS
ALIENS POLICE
CONSPIRACY
HATS
VIOLENCE
CRYSIS 2
DEUS EX
EXPLORATION
DRIVER
ACTION
MAX PAYNE 3
ESPIONAGE
WAR
TOMBS
GANGS
OUTLAWS
MILITARY
GUNS
SOUTH AMERICA
CRIME
MYSTERY
TREASURE
TOMB RAIDER
CALL OF JUAREZ
VIOLENCE
RED DEAD REDEMPTION
WILD WEST
TOTAL OVERDOSE
REVENGE
PEACE WALKER
CONFLICT
BATTLE FIELD
UNCHARTED
COMBAT
CONSPIRACY
INVASION

Sly 2: Band of Thieves

Where is it set? Unnamed
Keywords crime, thievery, stealth, heist
Description The globe-hopping thief visits the snowy, ice-covered Canadian tundra.

Crysis 2

Where is it set? New York
Keywords invasion, aliens, disaster, combat
Description New York is the unfortunate victim of an alien invasion in this technical marvel of a shooter.

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3

Where is it set? Unnamed
Keywords sports, simulation, skating, tricks
Description The second stage in the legendary skater is set around a snowy skate park.

Scarface: The World Is Yours

Where is it set? Miami
Keywords drugs, crime, violence, police
Description Tony survives an assassination attempt and tries to rebuild his empire in sun-soaked Miami.

Deus Ex: Human Revolution

Where is it set? Detroit
Keywords conspiracy, future, crime, combat
Description Today Detroit is in bad shape, but in *Deus Ex's* future it becomes the heart of the world's augmentation technology.

Metal Gear Solid: Peace Walker

Where is it set? Costa Rica
Keywords conspiracy, military, invasion, espionage
Description Big Boss and his new army, *Militaires Sans Frontieres*, are hired to drive an invading force from the peaceful nation of Costa Rica.

Red Dead Redemption

Where is it set? Mexican Border
Keywords crime, outlaws, guns, conspiracy
Description Your first trek across the border to Mexico in Rockstar's revenge epic is as evocative and atmospheric as gaming gets.

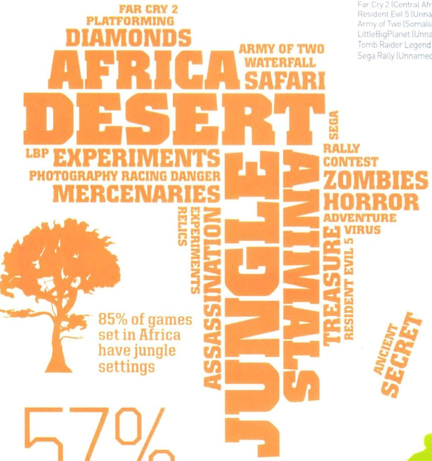
Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

Where is it set? Amazon
Keywords mystery, exploration, treasure, tombs
Description Drake goes treasure hunting in the sweltering Amazonian jungle—and barely escapes alive.

Total Overdose

Where is it set? Mexico
Keywords guns, action, crime, gangs
Description This comical, exaggerated vision of Mexico takes inspiration from Robert Rodriguez' mental Mexico Trilogy.

AFRICA AND AUSTRALIA


FAR CRY 2
PLATFORMING
DIAMONDS
AFRICA
ARMY OF TWO
WATERFALL
SAFARI
DESERT
SEGA
LBP
EXPERIMENTS
RALLY
CONTEST
PHOTOGRAPHY RACING DANGER
ZOMBIES
MERCENARIES
HORROR
ADVENTURE
VIRUS
RELICS
EXPERIMENTS
ASSASSINATION
JUNGLE
ANIMALS
TREASURE
RESIDENT EVIL 5
ANCIENT
SECRET

85% of games set in Africa have jungle settings

Games set in Africa

Afrika (Unnamed)
Far Cry 2 (Central Africa)
Resident Evil 5 (Unnamed)
Army of Two (Somalia)
LittleBigPlanet (Unnamed)
Tomb Raider Legend (Ghana)
Sega Rally (Unnamed)

44% feature male heroes

42% feature male and female heroes

14% feature female heroes

57%

of African games feature wildlife

Games set in Australia

DiRT (Outback)
Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves (Yuendumu)
Pro Evolution Soccer 6 (Sydney)
Syphon Filter 3 (Tanami Desert)
SBK-08 (Victoria)
Top Spin 4 (Melbourne)
Ty the Tasmanian Tiger (Tasmania)

77%

Average Metacritic score for games set in Australia

57% of games set in Australia are sports games

SYPHON FILTER
AUSTRALIA
MAGIC
THIEVERY
BIKES
SLY
SPORTS
TY
CONSPIRACY PLATFORMING ESPIONAGE SOCCER
SIMULATION
BIKES
COMPETITION
FOOTBALL PORTALS DIRT
CARS
STEALTH
SBK
OUTBACK
HEIST TOP SPIN
RACING
ANIMALS

What we learned

01 A LOT OF GAMES ARE ABOUT WAR

Also crime, violence, gangs and...well, you get the idea. This might seem obvious, but it's not until you lay everything out that you realize just how much gamers love killing/hurting things.

02 THE WHOLE MAP IS USED

There's not a single continent in the world where we couldn't find a game–even Antarctica, which we found examples for, but had to leave off for space reasons. Unexpected.

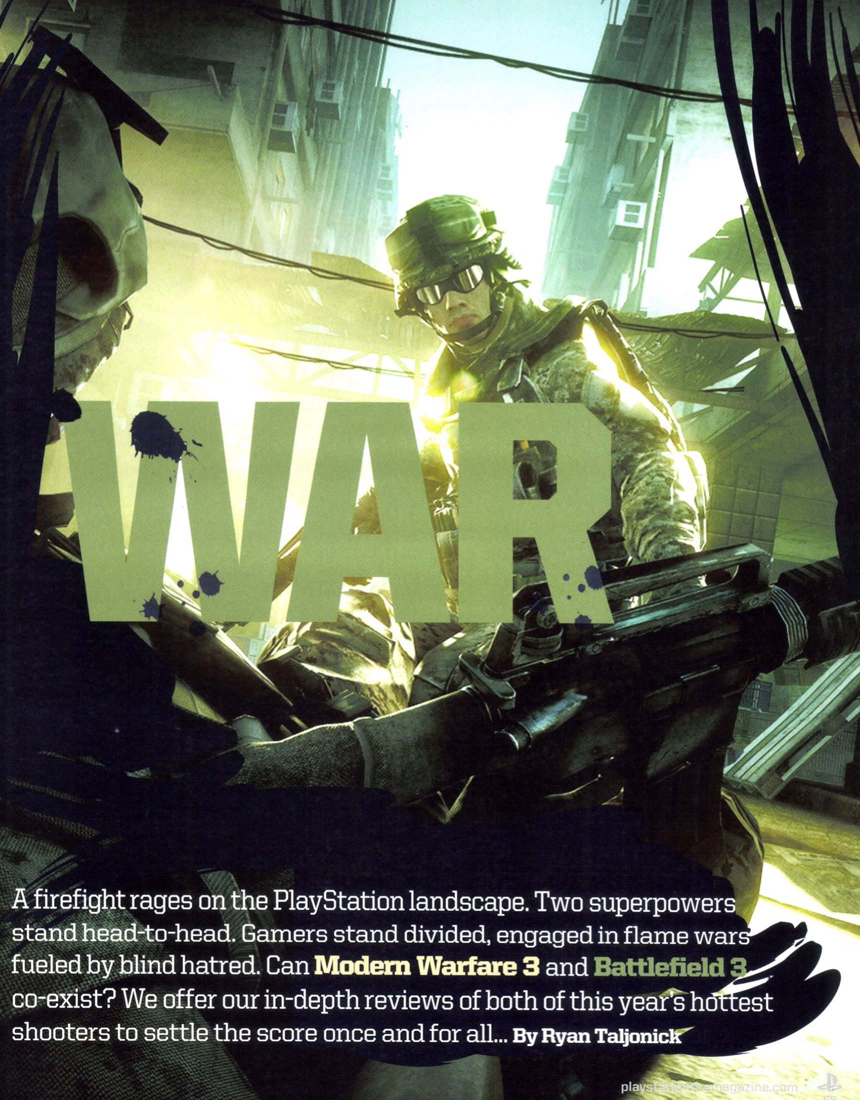
03 PLAYING TO STEREOTYPES

A lot of games pander to the stereotypes, or thematic motifs, of their setting: jungles in Africa, war in the Middle East, and so on. The setting usually defines the game, rather than just being a backdrop.

04 TIME PERIODS

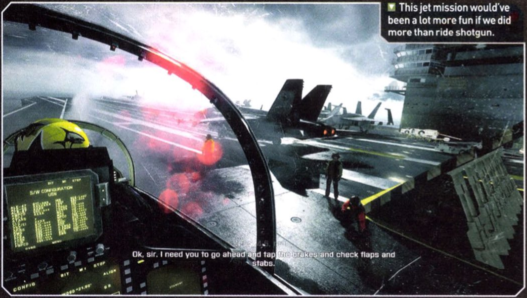
The majority of recent games are set in either the present day or the "near future." The death of the WWII genre has sparked a wider drop in the popularity of historical settings, it seems.

THIS MEANS

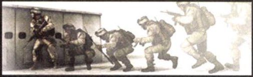


WAR

A firefight rages on the PlayStation landscape. Two superpowers stand head-to-head. Gamers stand divided, engaged in flame wars fueled by blind hatred. Can **Modern Warfare 3** and **Battlefield 3** co-exist? We offer our in-depth reviews of both of this year's hottest shooters to settle the score once and for all... **By Ryan Taljonick**


Ok, sir. I need you to go ahead and tap the brakes and check flaps and stabs.

This jet mission would've been a lot more fun if we did more than ride shotgun.



DICE's new Frostbite 2 engine boasts incredibly detailed visuals and realistic character animations.

Battlefield 3

Format PS3 **Pub** Electronic Arts **Dev** DICE **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature

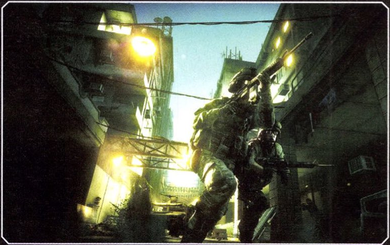
What's the story?

When two Russian-made portable nuclear devices go missing, it's up to protagonist Staff Sergeant Blackburn to find them and prevent World War III. The story is told through a series of flashbacks and flash-forwards while Blackburn is being interrogated—*Call of Duty: Black Ops*, anyone?

For a game that placed such a heavy emphasis on realism, *Battlefield 3* struggled to make us feel anything resembling immersion during its campaign. When instructed to stealthily knife an enemy, we approached him in a crouched position and suddenly fell over dead for no apparent reason. No shots were fired. No one saw us—the guard himself remained unaware of our presence. This happened over and over until we finally approached him standing up, which initiated a quick-time event. This is emblematic of the single-player experience *Battlefield 3* has to offer. We're constantly led by an invisible leash, one that provides only enough slack for us to briefly stray from our predestined path before yanking us back and reminding us that we're not in control.

See, *Battlefield 3* sets boundaries early on. It often teased us with thinly veiled illusions of freedom that were easily shattered. Grand firefights took place in seemingly grander environments—but when we tried to box in enemies from their unprotected flanks we were greeted with a "leaving playable area" screen. To defy that warning meant death. Firefights were spliced with lengthy doses of inactivity that left us with nothing to do but watch. The members of our squad—adorned with an ever-present "follow" beacon—led us from set piece to set piece. We killed whom they told us to kill. We blew up what they told us to blow up. We became a human wrecking ball; our only degree of freedom was in deciding which gun to use.

The single-player offering here is a missed opportunity. It consistently undermined itself as soon as we started to enjoy it. Explosive (and extremely intense) skirmishes are brought to life by brilliant lighting, fantastic visuals, and some of the best audio effects we've ever heard. Even small details like (sparsely) destructible cover and our soldier's realistic movement animations add an extra layer of realism that just doesn't typically exist in first-person shooters. It's a shame these mechanics are negated by a campaign that slapped our hands when we dared to play our own way, as if to say "look at all the cool things you can do in this game" without ever handing over the controls.



Head to head

BF3

Guns

(52)

Drivable vehicles in campaign

(1)

Playable protagonists

(4)

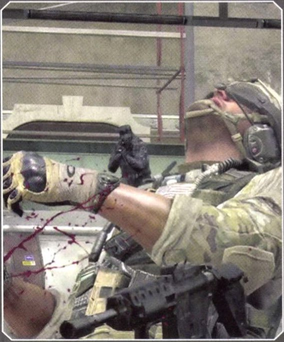
Door breaches

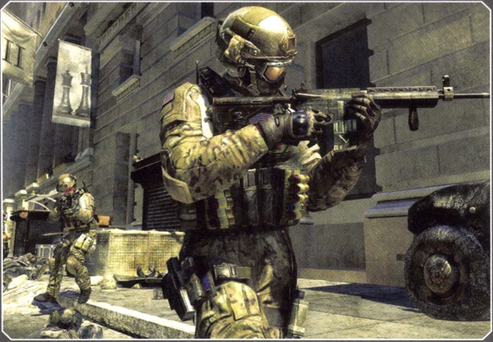
(2)

Modern Warfare 3

Format PS3 **Pub** Activision **Dev** Infinity Ward/Sledgehammer Games **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature

■ Playing as five different soldiers throughout the campaign can get unnecessarily confusing at times.





Which has more...

MW3

Guns

(49)

Drivable vehicles in campaign

(2)

Playable protagonists

(5)

Door breaches

(1 billion*)

*estimated

If *Battlefield 3* kept us on a leash, then *Modern Warfare 3* kept us in a fenced-in yard. Its campaign immediately established a better sense of freedom and control because we were rarely forced to approach skirmishes in a particular way. When a platoon of bad guys rushed our position, we flanked on balconies, alleyways, and other routes to take them out. Levels are confined, but they provide a degree of combat flexibility that doesn't exist in *Battlefield 3*. Granted, firefights don't capture the intensity of those in *Battlefield 3* because *Modern Warfare 3's* guns sound like peashooters in comparison and its character animations and visuals don't quite stack up. The game's running on a modified version of the engines used in its predecessors, and it shows. But when it comes to action-heavy set pieces, *Call of Duty* is king.

These dramatic sequences are what really define the *Modern Warfare* series. There's no shortage of enemy soldiers, massive explosions, and heart-pounding escapes. Fleeing a sinking submarine on a boat while a Russian fleet went up in flames around us really got our blood pumping, and there's an incredible scene on a hijacked airplane where we engaged in a slow-motion firefight in midair as turbulence tossed us around the cabin. There are tons of "holy sh–t" moments like these, and their pacing is spot-on.

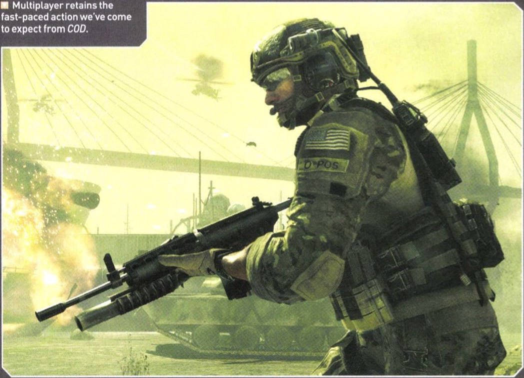
The campaign's non-stop action is, for better or worse, supplemented with controversial imagery. When an entire family (children included) was blown to pieces by a terrorist's roadside bomb, we couldn't help but cringe. Was the scene necessary? Did it really add anything to the experience that we hadn't already felt? No. At the same time, the smoldering ruins of a terrorized New York City provided an extra layer of emotional attachment and purpose to our actions. We *wanted* to reclaim the city and instill hope in the hearts of our people. In the end, *Modern Warfare 3* is all about payback—about tying up loose ends and finishing what the original *Modern Warfare* started. It may not stray from the typical *Call of Duty* formula, but it provides a damn fine single-player experience that is miles ahead of its competitor.

NO ALARMS
LAT 44°17.085 N
LON 065°48.922 W

■ **Surprisingly, we controlled more vehicles in *Modern Warfare 3's* campaign than we did in *Battlefield 3*.**

What's the story?

This is full-blown World War III. Thanks to the events of the "No Russian" airport mission in *Modern Warfare 2*, the Russians have invaded the U.S. as conflict erupts around the globe. We rejoin Soap and Price, as well as a handful of new gunslingin' heroes.



Multiplayer retains the fast-paced action we've come to expect from *COD*.

Modern Warfare 3

Anyone familiar with the *Modern Warfare* series will have a good idea of what to expect in *Modern Warfare 3's* multiplayer. Killing awards experience, experience awards new equipment, and new equipment results in more efficient killing. This familiar cycle works well within the scope of the arcadey, fast-paced action that made the series famous, and *Modern Warfare 3* is easily the most accessible entry to date thanks to the evolution of Killstreaks into Pointstreaks.

The brilliance of the Pointstreak system is that less-skilled players can still contribute to the success of their team through supportive rewards like counter-UAVs and crates of body armor. Choosing to play a supportive role also

Battlefield 3

As disappointing as *Battlefield 3's* single-player campaign was, we forgot all about it the second we set foot in our first multiplayer match. From the moment we spawned, the battlefield truly came to life. The "zip" sound of bullets whizzing by made us shudder with relief that we were still alive. Player-controlled jets and helicopters filled the skies while tanks and Humvees terrorized the ground. We stood paralyzed in the midst of all this chaos, overwhelmed by the sheer scope of the events unfolding before us. In the realm of online shooters, nothing else even comes close to *Battlefield 3's* incredible level of intensity and immersion.

One thing in particular impressed us: every round unfolded in an organic way. The tide of each match could turn at any moment thanks to the game's emphasis on teamwork,

One very welcome addition to *Battlefield 3*: the ability to go prone. Finally!

Flame War Fact Check

BF3

***OMG* Battlefield 3 *is just ripping off* Call of Duty.**

When it came to the campaign and Co-Op mode, it *did* feel like DICE was trying to outgun *Modern Warfare 3* at its own game. *Battlefield 3's* sense of self-seriousness and slow pacing really soured the single-player experience.

How can you noobs even play* Battlefield 3 *when it runs at 30 frames per second?

Having played both shooters, we had no qualms about *Battlefield's* 30 fps gameplay—it's easy to acclimate to it.

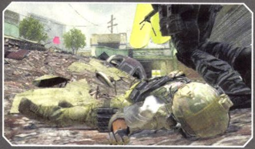
Every time I play online, the maps are so big I can't ever find anyone to kill.

Some of *Battlefield 3's* maps might be a tad too large for the console's 24-player restrictions, especially considering up to 60 players fill those same (slightly expanded) maps on the PC version.

means the Killstreak counter persists through death, so we didn't have to land seven consecutive kills to be useful to our team. *Call of Duty* veterans, however, can choose to stick with traditional Killstreak rewards. This dynamic is great for promoting teamwork in objective-based modes, but most matches still devolve into a contest to see who can shoot more dudes in the face.

Truth be told, after playing *Battlefield 3's* tactical, squad-based multiplayer on its epic, sprawling maps, we couldn't help but feel a bit bored in comparison. At least the returning Special Operations mode offers a nice change of pace. We had a blast playing the two-player missions with a buddy as we constantly strove to set new records in level completion time and efficiency. Additionally, a new Survival mode, which pits us against increasingly challenging waves of enemies, is ones of the game's most addictive new features. We spent hours trying to see how long we could survive against bad guys and suicide dog bombers, and we had a hell of a lot of fun doing it.

Another year, another *Call of Duty* release; *Modern Warfare 3* ultimately sticks to its guns, expanding on the great features that put the series on the map in the first place. It's an incredible, well-rounded addition to the franchise and rightfully earns its place in our collection.

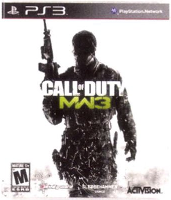


which is almost non-existent in *Modern Warfare 3*. A mix of soldier classes meant every player could contribute to the fight. Some could heal and revive allies, while others could resupply ammo and use machine guns with accuracy-increasing bipods for suppressive fire that distorts opponents' vision. Whether killing enemies or supporting friendlies, we scored points so long as we did *something* to benefit our team.

Aside from its necessitation of teamplay, *Battlefield's* biggest draws are its environmental destruction and vehicular combat. Frankly, we were surprised by the lack of destructibility in comparison to *Bad Company 2*, but the vehicles this time around are better than ever and add another layer of depth to the flow of battle. Flyable jets—something we haven't seen in the series since *Battlefield 2*—don't seem to contribute much to the overall fight at first, but in the hands of a skilled pilot, they're a devastating tool for taking out ground armor and enemy aircraft.

The weakest link of *Battlefield 3's* multiplayer, however, is its Co-Op mode, a variety of two-player missions similar to *Call of Duty's* Spec-Ops. These typically last 30-plus minutes apiece and are brutally challenging. Failure at any point meant we had to restart from the beginning, and the missions themselves aren't very memorable.

We couldn't help but feel disappointed at the gameplay outside of *Battlefield 3's* competitive online modes. As a complete package, it fell below our expectations. Those whose interests lie solely in online play, though, will no doubt find this to be one of PlayStation's most exhilarating shooters.



And the winner is...

Make no mistake—both games are great shooters, especially when it comes to multiplayer. *Battlefield 3* is an amazing technical accomplishment; its Frostbite 2 engine has propelled the game's visuals and animation to entirely new heights. But despite its incredible competitive online play, we can't ignore the shortcomings of its campaign and Co-Op.

As a complete package, *Modern Warfare 3* takes the cake. It's got a hard-hitting campaign, addictive cooperative offerings, and there are enough changes to its multiplayer to keep the familiar experience still feeling fresh.

Modern Warfare 3 PlayStation 9

Battlefield 3 PlayStation 8

MW3

***I'm sick of new* Call of Duty's *every year—it's stupid.* MW3 *is just a $60 expansion pack to* MW2.**
It may be true that *MW3* runs on a modified version of *Modern Warfare 2's* engine—but it's far more than a mere "expansion pack."

***Infinity Ward is so lazy they recycled some of the buildings right from the original* Modern Warfare *into* Modern Warfare 3.**
Okay, okay. Some buildings *were* recycled. Want proof? One building from *Modern Warfare's* Pipeline multiplayer map can be found in *Modern Warfare 3's* "Back on the Grid" level.

Modern Warfare 3 *is for idiots. Only name-calling kids play that game.*

Trust us—listen to the chatter of any online game long enough, and "name-calling kids" are sure to pipe up. That's what the mute button is for! Use it, and use it often.

TEEN
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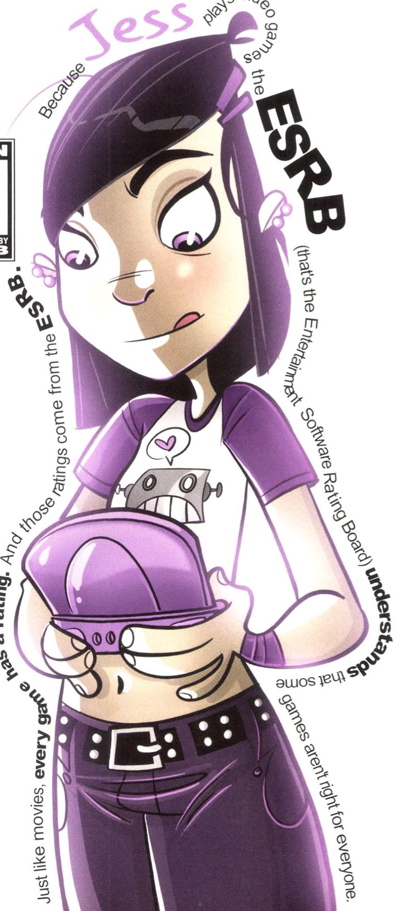
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB



Because **Jess** plays video games the **ESRB** (that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) **understands** that some games aren't right for everyone.

Just like movies, **every game has a rating.** And those ratings come from the **ESRB.**

www.ESRB.org

PlayStation
The Official Magazine

Reviews

Your essential guide to new releases

War. What is it good for? Selling a whole bunch of games, apparently. *Modern Warfare 3* smashed all kinds of entertainment sales records upon its release in November, and *Battlefield 3* wasn't all that far behind.

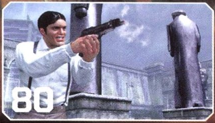
So naturally, we decided to stage a little war of our own to see which military game could outgun its rival. We just hope the war we've started isn't a *flame* war (seriously guys, calm down, they're both great games).

We've also got a secret war that's finally coming to a head: the ancient battle between Templars and Assassins. Though *Assassin's Creed: Revelations* doesn't answer quite as many questions as we'd hoped, we're happy to spend another Christmas stabbing jerks in the neck...and also playing PS3 exclusive pack-in *Assassin's Creed*.

But war isn't all we have going on this holiday season. In fact, our favorite game this month features absolutely no guns whatsoever—just spells, swords, and, of course, dragons. That's right, we're talking about *WWE '12*...no, wait *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. Yeah, definitely *Skyrim*. Though some of the Nords do look eerily similar to some professional wrestlers...

NEED FOR SPEED: THE RUN

Vrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooommmmmmmmmmm!



GOLDENEYE 007: RELOADED

Okay, we know it's the name of a killer satellite and all, but seriously, what the heck *is* a GoldenEye?

CORPSE PARTY

There aren't enough "WTFs" in the world to accurately describe this game. There are, however, quite a few adjectives to choose from, incuding creepy, bizzare, and...well, kind of boring.

How we score our reviews...

10 Awesome Instant classic that's nearly PlayStation perfection.

9 Excellent Highly recommended and a great investment.

8 Great Wonderful yet possesses minor flaws.

7 Good Enjoyable but with definite room for improvement.

6 Acceptable A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Mediocre A game that's both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Flawed Too flawed to be anything more than a curiosity.

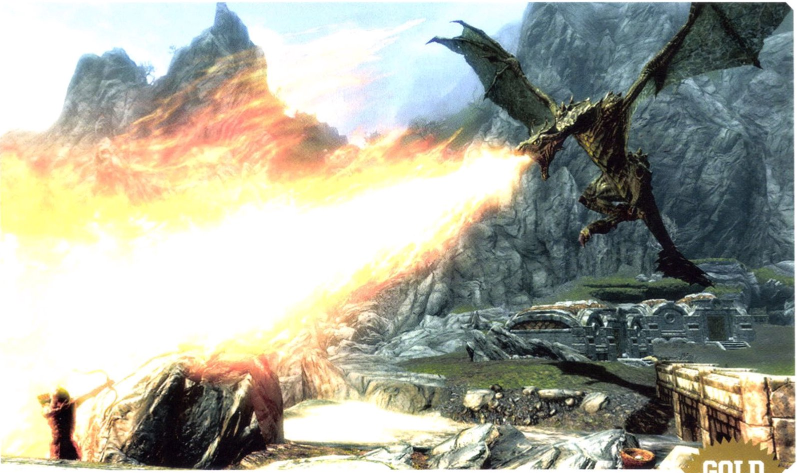
3 Poor A seriously defective game with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it like the plague.

1 Raw Sewage Apparently, feces *can* be pressed on a disc.

GOLD AWARD PlayStation

Our Highest Accolade The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics, and profound appeal.



GOLD AWARD
PlayStation
The Official Magazine

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

There be dragons here

The last *Elder Scrolls* game, *Oblivion*, revolved around a civilized sort of fantasy world. It had big, bustling cities at the heart of a great empire. There were traces of improving technology. The Renaissance was on the horizon. *Skyrim* takes place 200 years later, but in spirit, it turns back the clock. This is a story about a dark age in a cold place. Not a whole lot of civilization in this one—like the old joke goes, it throws back to the days when the men were men and the sheep were nervous. Although the men are pretty nervous too—on account of the dragons.

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Bethesda Softworks **Dev** Bethesda Game Studios **Price** $59.99 **ESRB** Mature **It's like** real life with fewer laws and more dragons.

It's a big part of what makes *Skyrim* fun: the chance to explore a real red-blooded, ice-and-fire fantasy. Conan the Cimmerian would feel right at home here, along with all the other great heroes of pulp fiction. The biggest part, though, is the engine underneath it, the game design keeping an amazing world in motion. Bethesda has outdone itself again; this could be the PS3's finest role-playing adventure.

Hour of the Dragon

For maybe five or 10 minutes at the beginning of *Skyrim*, the story is in full control and the game runs along on rails. In that time, we discover the basics of the plot and meet a few key players: Tamriel's snowbound northern province is in the grip of a civil war as the remnants of the Empire fight a native rebellion. Then a whole a new force comes to upset the chessboard—the dragons that everyone thought were dead.

Once those 10 minutes are up, the handholding is over. Aside from a few minor exceptions, we're in control from then on out, free to take off across a massive game world and see what there is to see, from the snow-capped mountains to the deepest caverns and anywhere in between. Think the landscape in *Oblivion* was huge? *Skyrim's* breadth of real estate leaves it in the shade, and thanks to a much-improved graphics engine, it all feels far more alive. Even little touches of animation do their part: townspeople puttering around shops and taverns, rivers that rush along as little fish leap upstream. Other moments honestly qualify as epic, especially when gigantic dragons soar down on the attack. The *Elder Scrolls* series has never had dragons before—at least not living ones, which

»

Short handed

Skyrim has a pretty strong voice cast, but it could use a bigger one. Even though it has more voice actors than *Oblivion* did, some actors got the duty for a lot of different characters. *Babylon 5* fans will get a kick out of hearing Claudia Christian. They just might get tired of hearing her a tad too often.

We can dual-wield weapons and spells in *Skyrim*. Doubly nice.

once seemed a little odd considering that they're usually a fantasy staple. Now it makes more sense. Bethesda was waiting for a chance to do them right, and *Skyrim* does dragons the way they ought to be done.

Want to slay dragons? Then go forth and slay them. Aside from looking and sounding amazing, the dragon-slaying battles give up awesome loot and gradually unlock a collection of deadly special powers. Nowhere is it written that anyone has to go slay the mystical creatures, though, which is where the genius of *Skyrim's* scenario design lies. There's not a lot that we necessarily *have to do* at all. In an age of games that are happy to funnel us through a long chain of scripted events for 10 hours and be done with it, this is something special: a game where it's fun to go out and get lost. It isn't exactly unstructured—the central storyline and a boatload of side-quests provide all the structure and specific goals anyone could want. It's just that it's often just as interesting to pick a direction and say, "Today, I'm going thataway."

Rule by Axe

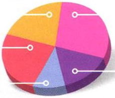
The folks at Bethesda have claimed that it's possible to run through the principal story arc in about 30 hours. That would likely require an inhuman focus on clearing the key quests and doing absolutely nothing else. In practice, it's almost impossible to keep doing a single thing for very long. Soon enough, the average player's quest journal is going to stretch out into a long, long list of half-finished missions. Something else always seems to come up, whether it's a new quest, a new dungeon, or maybe just an addiction to roaming across the plains and hunting moose.

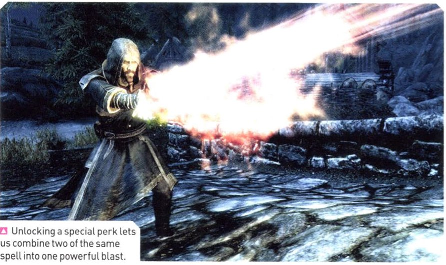
The way character development works in *Skyrim*, even wandering without a purpose can lead to some kind of tangible benefit. Doing almost anything leads to growth in

It's almost always snowing in some parts of the world. Luckily, our hero doesn't mind the cold.

Go ahead and snatch up whatever's not nailed down. Just keep an eye out in case the city guard's watching.

What we did in... The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim





Unlocking a special perk lets us combine two of the same spell into one powerful blast.

Skyrim does dragons the way they ought to be done.

one skill area or another, and building up any skill also builds up the character's overall experience level. It feels almost effortless sometimes: cast more spells and spells cast faster, keep swinging swords and swords deal more damage, pick lots of locks and chests will give up their contents with ease. Like busting heads with a warhammer? Pretty soon the bards will be spinning tales and songs about the meanest warhammer in the North.

Although *Skyrim's* 18 skill groups cluster roughly together into magic, thieving, and combat, there aren't any character classes as such and not many defining statistics either. It's a major shift from *Oblivion*, which had a complex system of classes and stat requirements that defined a hero's skill set. Instead, our characters organically evolve according to how we decide we want to play them. This may sound a little odd, but it turns into one of the game's most addictive qualities: watching heros grow to reflect the way we like to experience their adventures.

Perks of Power

The game still features specific skills called "perks" that grant a unique ability or advantage—a sniping zoom-in effect is an Archery perk, a bonus to the power of magic weapons is an Enchanting perk, and so on. The hero gets to pick one with each experience level, but perks call for a minimum level of experience in their skill area. As a result, the chance to grab new perks provides a few milestones to shoot for so building up a skill doesn't always feel like one long, continuous process.

Monster Mash

DRAGONS

They're back and they're hungry. Luckily, they're easier to kill than you might think.

FROSTBITE SPIDERS

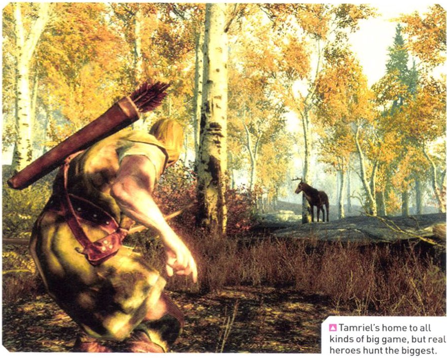
Creepy and ugly, but not very dangerous. Except for the really, really big ones.

DRAUGR

That's Skyrim-ese for "zombie," a common infestation in barrows, crypts, and caverns.

GIANTS

These guys won't start a fight, but they'll finish it for sure. Try to give their camps a wide berth.



Tamriel's home to all kinds of big game, but real heroes hunt the biggest.

Altogether, the skill system's still deep enough. It's very user-friendly, and cutting down on some of the out-front number crunching has a useful side effect—it shifts a decent chunk of our focus back toward what actually makes the game fun: smashing things, zapping things, stealing things, *doing* things. The more time our hands spend engaged with the controls, the less time we're looking at a mess of statistics, and that's always a change for the better.

A game this ambitious is going to have some loose ends and frayed edges. It's been patched once already as we write this, clearing up glitches in quest progression and general stability problems. The load times can be pretty stiff, especially at a few key transitions between different parts of the game world. Just as in *Fallout 3*, some pieces of cinematic animation don't always mesh together exactly right. Gamers who want pristine cutscenes should go replay something like *Metal Gear Solid 4*. For everyone else out there, Tamriel's waiting. *Skyrim* is a gorgeous production that truly does justice to the words "roleplaying game." It doesn't just tell us a story, it gives us the chance to tell a story of our own. At its best, that's what an interactive art form should be all about. Bethesda just gave us a beautiful reminder of what a game can truly be.

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DAVID F. SMITH

Clumsy carriage races
are as exciting and uniqu
as the action gets.

Assassin's Creed Revelations

The end of an era...finally

Info

Format PS3
Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal
Price $59.99
ESRB Mature
It's like a new city and story, but not a new game.

The city is ours. The streets, the churches, the markets—all of it. With deadly hidden blades strapped to our wrists and a menacing hood shrouding our face, we fly across the rooftops and rain death on our enemies before slipping back into the crowd unnoticed and untraceable. We are agile, we are powerful, we are Assassins. Pretty exciting, right? Of course, for fans of the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, it's also pretty familiar. Truth to be told, a bit *too* familiar. Though the team at Ubisoft has peppered this year's installment with a handful of new ideas like custom bombs and a tower defense meta-game, very little has actually changed between last year's *Brotherhood* and this year's *Revelations*.

In a way, that's really not such a bad thing. *Brotherhood*—like *Assassin's Creed II* before it—was an immensely enjoyable game, and everything that's made the series such a success so far remains intact: the adrenaline-pumping free running, the deep commitment to a fascinating time and place in history, and the immense medieval metropolis filled with all kinds of quests and quarrels.

The city this time around, Constantinople, may actually be our favorite of the series so far. Its rich and varied districts offer a huge variety of areas to explore, and its crisscrossing zip lines add a thrilling new traversal option. God bless the newly added Hook-blade for giving us more to do than simply hold R1 and watch Ezio do all the work. Since the bulk of the game is spent simply running through the streets—either buying up businesses, capturing Templar Dens (the new Borgia Towers), or just commuting between missions—fans will likely be satisfied enjoying the familiar fun in a fresh setting.

Five Changes to the Assassin's workflow

Recruiting

Ezio must now complete specific missions to recruit certain (but not all) assassin recruits.

Getting made

Once a recruit has earned enough XP, he will accompany Ezio on a final cooperative mission.

Masterful

When a recruit attains the rank of Master Assassin, he can take charge of a Den and prevent attacks.

Tower defense

Dens without Assassin leaders are vulnerable. If the Templars attack, we direct an amusing tower defense game.

Spin control

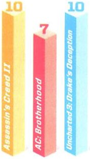
In order to avoid conflict altogether, we search the streets for heralds to bribe and witnesses to murder.

With each new game in the series, the story has grown more and more abstract and convoluted. We're not sure the writers even know what's really going on.

Unfortunately, the series hasn't aged nearly as well as Ezio. Time for a change.

Need for Creed

But *Revelation's* lack of legitimate change is difficult to overlook despite the solid core experience. This is the third full-fledged *Creed* game in three years, yet some basic issues haven't been altered or improved. The best way to handle combat, for example, remains the same: stand still, wait for an opponent to attack, kill him with a one-hit counter. This system made sense when *Creed* was a stealth franchise, but as the games shifted more and more towards action, the combat should have evolved as well.



ScorePole
While by no means a bad game, *Revelations* may be the weakest of the series.

Why even bother purchasing new weapons when the weakest knife can deal a one-hit kill?

The kill streak mechanic and new weapons like the custom-built bombs were likely intended to remedy this saddening stagnation, but while they're definitely fun to mess around with, we had very few opportunities to really put them to good use. Most enemies we encountered were, as usual, weak and predictable, and we rarely discovered scenarios that demanded a stealthy approach (which would have made the distraction bombs useful). Because we had to go out of our way to find uses for them, they ultimately added very little to the experience.

Yet the game's biggest shortcoming may be its biggest draw: the story. While it does indeed wrap up the tales of classic heroes Ezio Auditore and Altaïr Ibn-La'Ahad, the ending is more confusing than fulfilling, and plenty of questions remain unanswered. Worse, the plot leading up the finale is plodding and weak. Not having a central villain robs the game of motivation, and when the man pulling the Templars' strings *is* finally revealed, it actually took us a couple seconds to remember who he was. Sure, searching for the keys to Altair's library is an enticing premise, but there's very little plot development or payoff.

Assassin Nation

Perhaps because the story is so meandering, none of the campaign missions really stood out, sticking instead to the standard *Creed* formula. The results aren't dreadful, but they're also not particularly memorable. Even the new Assassin recruitment missions, while sound in theory, proved dull, and completionists will be sad to hear that both faction missions and the glyph puzzles have been cut—though Desmond's autobiographical first-person missions add an intriguing new twist.

Fortunately, *Brotherhood's* assassination-based multiplayer returns with a vengeance. Fresh modes like deathmatch and a capture the flag variant, as well as new social tools, elevate the experience above its previous incarnation while retaining the same uniquely frustrating fun (we mean that affectionately). With all the new options and even fewer annoying quirks, the multiplayer's potential longevity helps compensate for the enjoyable yet rehashed campaign.

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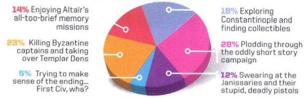
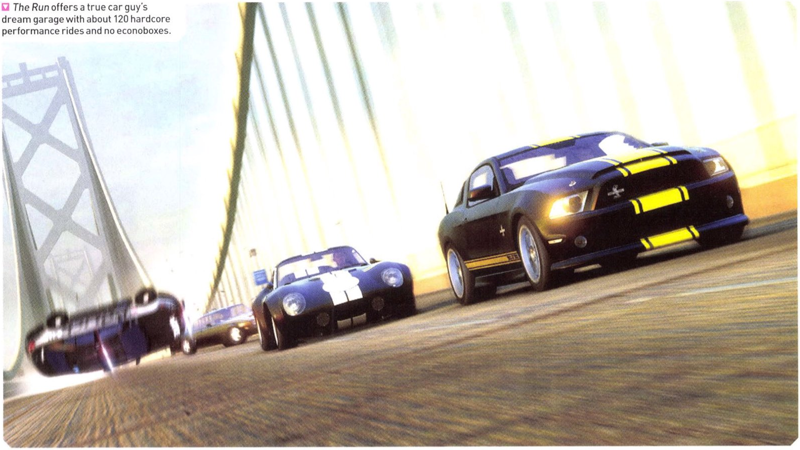
SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

What we did in... Assassin's Creed: Revelations





The Run offers a true car guy's dream garage with about 120 hardcore performance rides and no econoboxes.

Need for Speed The Run

Middle of the road

The highpoint of *Need for Speed: The Run* occurs on a snowy Rocky Mountain pass. We're chasing down another rival in The Run, an illicit San Francisco-to-New York road race with a $25 million purse, and we're dodging the debris and detritus of an avalanche. It's a majestic moment befitting the epic nature of a transcontinental race. Unfortunately, it's also the only truly extraordinary sequence in the game.

For the majority of *The Run*, the racing is doled out in similar, precisely measured chunks across its 10-stage campaign. There's a constant recycling of "pass 'X' number of cars" objectives, timed-checkpoint challenges, and rival showdowns with variety coming in the form of weather, time of day, and traffic density. There are some signature moments in addition to the avalanche episode—dodging machine gun fire from mafia helicopters in Chicago, for one—but passing the game's 200-odd opponents often seemed more of a grind than the escalating series of adrenaline-pumping faceoffs we'd hoped for.

Under the Hood

The Run's core arcade racing gameplay does, however, deliver accessible and enjoyable driving action. Since this isn't a track-based racer, the key to success is how quickly we react to the road and surface traffic as it unfolds before us. Of course, there's the constant battle for position with other racers while avoiding pursuing police cars, but if at first we don't succeed with our driving skills, we can always dip into our flashback resets to get past particularly challenging sections.

What keeps *The Run's* gameplay from shining, though, is its sporadic but infuriating inconsistencies. Vehicles don't exhibit simulation levels of handling nuance—fine. But why does the rear-wheel drive Lexus LFA inexplicably feel more stable in the snow than on dry pavement? Why can we smash through most lampposts, but a small, barely visible roadside obstruction immediately wrecks our ride? Why can we scrape

Info

PS3
NEED FOR SPEED
THE RUN
EA

Format PS3
Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Black Box
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like *The Cannonball Run* taking itself too seriously.

Influences Five car movies with uncredited NFS cameos

Bullitt (1968)
San Francisco

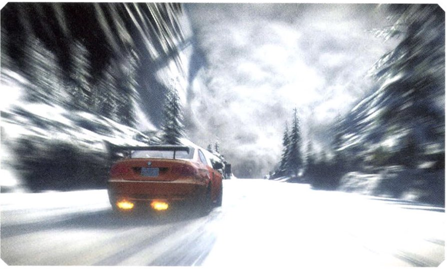
The French Connection (1971)
New York

The Gumball Rally (1976)
Interstate freeways

HAWAIIAN TROPIC

The Cannonball Run (1981)
Race across the U.S.

Quantum of Solace (2008)
Aston Martins



Dodging avalanches in the Rockies is *The Run's* most memorable sequence.

EA's Autolog feature integrates itself into every nook and cranny of *The Run*.

and glance off some objects when others bring our car to a grinding halt? As far as we can tell, these variances are simply in place to add random difficulty to the game.

As for *The Run's* well-publicized on-foot segments? Thankfully, there are only three instances to endure. The superfluous quick-time events offer little challenge beyond getting past the one tricky (read: unfair) input that forces multiple flow-robbing replays.

Pole Position

Whereas *The Run's* campaign never quite inspired passion, the game's multiplayer and Challenge Series modes at least offer replay value. The multiplayer matches allow us to explore the cars we unlock with our on-road achievements or purchase with earned XP, and the Challenge Series' 70 events provide new ways to test our driving prowess with multi-tier performance goals.

There's good racing and even the occasional thrilling moment to be had in *The Run*, but its overall experience never lives up to the implied grandeur of its cross-country speedfest premise. Mixing some more "epic" into the gas tank would've made for a far more exhilarating and memorable ride.

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ROGER BURCHILL

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation The Official Magazine

inFamous
Festival of Blood

Cole's fright night

Info

Format PSN
Pub SCEA
Dev Sucker Punch
Price $9.99
ESRB Everyone
It's like someone finally picked a monster other than zombies.

This horror-themed spinoff immediately earns points for not putting us in another familiar world re-skinned with the walking dead. Instead, *Festival of Blood* shelves zombies in favor of blood-lusting vampires. A neat narrative twist sets the fanged foes up as Cole's latest threat but also sees the lightning-spewing protagonist infected. Unfolding during Pyre Night—a Halloween-meets-Mardi Gras celebration—the standalone DLC tasks us with reversing Cole's curse and saving the city before sunrise.

Of course, this means wasting baddies with some of Cole's existing powers as well as a fresh set of abilities. Cole's Amp is traded in for a heart-piercing stake and Shadow Swarm, which replaces his ionic powers and grants the gift of flight. The former delivers super-satisfying visceral kills, while the latter yields a slick visual effect that shifts the perspective to first-person and frames it with a flurry of bats.

Cole's wicked skills are unleashed on fresh freaks, such as Harpies, Fiends, and Firstborns, populating New Marais—which receives a fun macabre makeover—as well as the depths of a new catacomb level. While clearing the city of these night-stalking creatures only take a few hours, *Festival of Blood's* a fright-filled ride worth sinking our fangs into. MATT CABRAL

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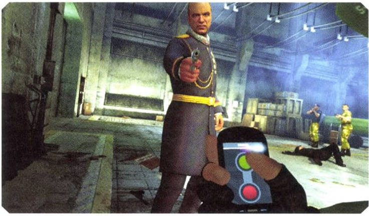
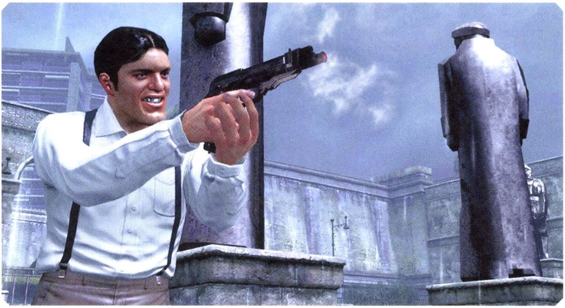
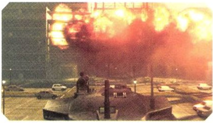


Does this scene look familiar? No? Well, don't worry. The story may have been rewritten, but everything still makes sense in context.



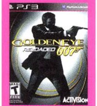


The infamous Russian tank mission returns, but this time, the explosions look a whole lot more...explosive.

GoldenEye 007 Reloaded

License to reminisce

Info



Format PS3
Pub Activision
Dev Eurocom Entertainment Software
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like a remake of a favorite Bond movie.

In 2010, Activision finally answered gamers' prayers with *GoldenEye: Reloaded*, remaking Rare's classic first-person shooter for Nintendo's Wii. And make no mistake, this was a full-blown remake. The visuals were remade from the ground up, and the entire story was rewritten to match the current generation's standards, with actual voice acting, a more interesting plot, and fast-paced gameplay. Now, they've bumped everything to high-definition and adapted the game for PS3.

Eurocom managed to make a game that not only elicits fond memories of the original but does so without sacrificing quality. The story—which swaps out the suave Pierce Brosnan for the rough Daniel Craig—is fairly fun, hitting the same notes as the original without feeling encumbered by it. It provides nearly a dozen hours of modest entertainment, and once it's finished, there are additional objectives and even another single-player mode called MI6 Ops. MI6 Ops mode is essentially *Reloaded*'s version of *Call of Duty*'s Spec Ops mode, featuring short, story-less, scored challenges.

But the biggest update from the Wii version, besides the enhanced graphics (which bare few of the scars typically associated with HD ports of SD games), comes with the expansion of the multiplayer. Eurocom added new characters, game modes, and maps to the multiplayer offerings, and while it's still a far cry from the *Call of Duty* experience, it's a solid alternative to *Modern Warfare*. In many ways it feels like a PC mod for *Call of Duty* with Bond weapons and locations, and that's not at all a bad thing.

Well, when it works, at least. It's nearly impossible to get a game going in any of the modes besides traditional Team Deathmatch as the matchmaking functions sporadically and the game's community is anything but flourishing. It's a shame, too—the additional modes can be an absolute blast. Luckily, four-player splitscreen is included as well and does a good job of reminding us of the fun we had with the original game all those years ago.

The biggest issue with *Reloaded* isn't in the game itself, but in the release date. Because the game hit during the busiest time of the year it hasn't gain the popularity it deserves, leaving the multiplayer servers barren and essentially cutting the value in half. What's left is an interesting (albeit not outstanding) single-player campaign, a fun mission-based mode, and multiplayer that's best experienced via splitscreen. But that's definitely enough to warrant a reload.

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HOLLANDER COOPER

LEGO Harry Potter Years 5–7

The potion's a bit off

Info

Format PS3
Pub Warner Bros. Interactive Ent.
Dev Traveller's Tales
Price $49.99
ESRB Everyone 10+
It's like the sheen is off the magic.

Anyone who's played *LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1–4* (or any other *LEGO* game) will know what to expect from *Years 5-7*. By now, the series' signature bust-and-rebuild platforming gameplay is either endearingly established and charming or overly familiar and stale. But as formulaic as the series is, we could always count on inventive surprises to keep each installment fresh. *Years 5–7* follows form, but less so than in the past.

The primary culprit here is the recycling of the previous game's locales. Yes, of course we're going to revisit Hogwarts and other *Potter* sites, but the manner in which they're re-presented seems less inspired. Gameplay improvements are incremental, with a wand-dueling mechanic and a new water spell being the most notable additions. Everything still engages adequately, but there's a layer of cleverness that's disappeared.

However, *Years 5-7* does find its footing in its final third with fresh magical moments. And, as always, there's nothing better than a *LEGO* title for some quality parent/child co-op gaming time. ROGER BURCHILL

PlayStation 7

BurgerTime World Tour

Format **PSN** Pub **MonkeyPaw Games/Konami** Dev **Frozen Codebase** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Everyone**

Like the original '80s arcade game, this puzzling platformer has a scaffold-climbing chef running over massive cheese slices and big buns until they fall down and form a giant burger. Which would be easier if he didn't have to contend with angry pickles and collapsing platforms. While far more inventive than the original, this remake still feels old school, as it's just a matter of figuring out how to get from point A to point B while avoiding disgruntled hotdogs. Nice enough for retro fans, but not so much for new gamers. PAUL SEMEL

PlayStation 6

Winter Stars

Format **PS3** Pub **Deep Silver** Dev **49 Games** Price **$29.99** ESRB **Everyone**

We play a team of winter sports athletes in this budget title, competing for tournament cups around the world in a variety of events, including bobsledding, snowboarding, paraskiing, and more. The overly simplistic Move controls mostly work well here, but occasional hiccups caused us to careen off the snow-covered path and collide with trees or fall off cliffs. We used the experience points awarded for completing events to upgrade members of our team, making them more proficient in their respective sports—too bad none were very exciting to play.

PlayStation 5

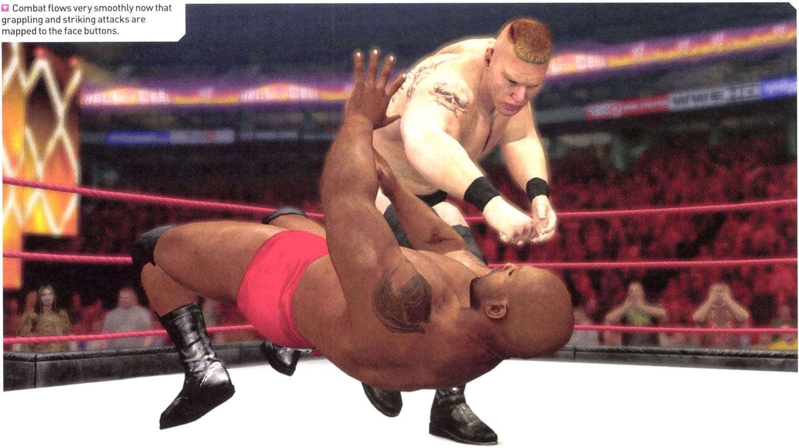
RYAN TALJONICK

EyePet & Friends

Format **PS3** Pub **SCEA** Dev **SCE Studios London** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

EyePet & Friends was made for kids whose parents won't buy them real pets—there's little appeal here for adults. Most of the gameplay comes from training, feeding, and bathing our tiny mutant monkey-cats. We earn tokens by playing simple minigames that unlock even more simple minigames. A traditional, large living room set-up is required for the PS Eye to properly read the Move controller, but even then we occasionally encountered some control issues. Still, we're sure there are some children out there dying for a Mon-Cat friend. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation 6



Combat flows very smoothly now that grappling and striking attacks are mapped to the face buttons.

WWE '12

Still king of the ring, but not as new as it seems

The *SmackDown* series has been a PlayStation mainstay since the PSone years, which makes the choice to ditch the name and go with the more straightforward *WWE '12* unexpected. Though the franchise has long been the most dominant wrestling series, *SmackDown* had become predictable, if not slightly stale. This rebranding gives it a new start, but underneath the fresh paint job, things aren't too different...and that's not necessarily a bad thing.

WWE '12's most obvious adjustments come where it matters most: in the ring. The combat has become faster and more precise. Grappling in particular has been upgraded, as developer Yuke's has abandoned the Right-stick controls, bringing back the simpler one button commands. Strikes are basically the same, but now that both attack types are on the face buttons, combat flows better.

The rest of the actual wrestling has sped up in general, with superstars recovering faster, and moves exhibit more realistic physics. The matches feel more natural, though allowing a third party to interrupt any move at any time can make matches with three or more wrestlers last forever. It's how it would work in a real match, but no one can seem to complete a move, let alone keep two people down long enough to pin one of them.

WWE '12 can still be fun solo, as dense single-player campaigns like Road to WrestleMania and WWE Universe are back. Universe is a more random season mode; it's fun (though slightly unfocused), but its real strength lies in how customizable it is.

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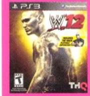


Format PS3
Pub THQ
Dev Yuke's
Price $59.99
ESRB Teen
It's like *SmackDown 2011* picked up some new moves.

Five Suggestions For custom arena inspiration

WCW Saturday Night
While it might be tough to make the stadium look small enough, we miss the simple blue and yellow ring.

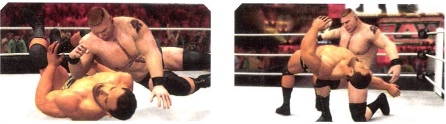
SummerSlam '98
The classic showdown between Austin and Undertaker happened here around the Highway to Hell themed arena.

WrestleMania IX
Everyone has to start somewhere, so why not go with the very lo-fi setting of most independent promotions?

Soccer Pitch
Just imagine the team is on a foreign tour and had to make do with the field of the world's most popular sport.

The Danger Room
You know, the one from *X-Men*? Just try to make the ring as sterile and sci-fi as possible.

"Hi, I'm Brock Lesnar. I have a sword tattoo on my chest, and I like to toss grown men like rag dolls."



Improved physics result in moves that look more realistic than ever before.

Meanwhile, Road to WrestleMania is better than ever, with a clear storyline running through all three superstars' campaign sections.

Also back are *SmackDown*'s incredibly deep customization options. We can build virtually anyone in the character creator mode, which has been further improved upon in *WWE '12*. The options in the story creator, logo creator, and the brand new ring creator (where we can build an event to look however we please) have also been expanded. The online infrastructure for sharing all those creations is back too, so the huge community of wrestling fans can admire and distribute their hard work.

WWE '12 is one of the most feature-rich games on the market, but all those features come at a price: the game isn't as new as the title implies. All its best features are just brought in from *SmackDown*, which makes sense but is a bit disappointing. Those who were tired of *SmackDown* and were looking for a fresh start will probably feel let down after the glow of the improved controls fades. But most probably won't be bothered, as *SmackDown* was a great series with so many vital tools that only a fool would throw away. It's not an original take on sports entertainment, but *WWE '12* updates enough to keep it relevant to fans. MAX MOREY

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Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3

Here comes a new challenger

Info

PS3
ULTIMATE MARVEL VS CAPCOM 3

Format PS3
Pub Capcom
Dev Capcom
Price $39.99
ESRB Teen
It's like the dev team included some characters just to prove they could.

Capcom's first major update to *Marvel vs. Capcom 3* comes less than a year after the game's initial release but brings 12 new characters, eight new stages, and a host of tweaks and changes to the game. While the new fighters are certainly the main draw, other features, like new special moves for returning characters and a spectator mode for online play, are big bonuses.

The new characters (Phoenix Wright in particular) are well designed and remain incredibly loyal to their source materials: Dr. Strange has all his alliterative spells, Hawkeye wields a number of trick arrows, and Frank West uses homemade weapons and throws zombies. *UMvC3* also makes finding an opponent online much easier, with revamped lobbies that let us preview a player's connection speed before starting a match.

At just $40, *UMvC3* is a steal for those who haven't yet tried it. For those who have, the re-balanced cast, improved online functionality, added fan service, and new characters should be more than enough for hardcore fans to justify the purchase, though casual players can probably skip this upgrade. BOB JOHNSON

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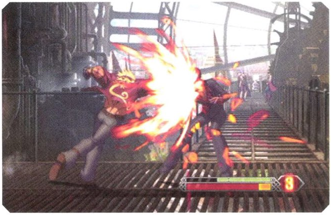
With demanding mechanics and a dearth of accessible single-player content, *KOF XIII* might only appeal to longtime fans.



The King of Fighters XIII

"King" might be an overstatement

Info
Format PS3 **Pub** Atlus
Dev SNK Playmore
Price $49.99 **ESRB** Teen
It's like a fighter that lacks discipline and motivation.

Like any good fighting game, *The King of Fighters XIII* rewards skilled players. The three versus three, one character at a time match-ups ask us to be handy with a trio of characters, and the new Drive Cancels and Hyper Drive mode allow skilled players to do huge damage by directly linking special moves into other special moves. Casual players, on the other hand, might feel unwelcome.

Those looking for single player content can while away a few hours with the story mode, but the blathering walls of text over barely animated character art will only be of interest to the most die-hard *KOF* fans. Mission mode gives us a set of combos to execute with each character, though they're too difficult for casual-level players almost immediately and the game rarely explains the intricacies of what's happening.

KOF XIII's online options offer the typical Ranked and Casual matches, and the game allows us to save replays of every match. Fortunately, the subpar netcode from *KOF XII* has been scrapped entirely. The matches we played online were very smooth, though between match load times could be lengthy.

KOF XIII is an improvement over its predecessor in almost every way, but it still feels undernourished. Hardcore players will enjoy its skill-based system and solid online play, but the dearth of single-player content and tutorials makes the game a harder sell for casual fighting game fans. BOB JOHNSON

PlayStation The Official Magazine **6**

The graphics have improved only slightly, but the gameplay holds up well.

Tekken Hybrid

Smash face like it's 1999

Buyers beware: this isn't the amazing deal it appears to be. *Tekken Hybrid* is a bundle tailor-made for diehard *Tekken* fans that'll leave the average gamer feeling hoodwinked.

Hybrid's highpoint is an HD upgrade of PS2 classic *Tekken Tag Tournament* that lets us relive our glory days of buttonmashing in style as Law and Eddy Gordo. This franchise cornerstone is still the only *Tekken* with tag-team battles, striking the perfect balance between frenetic fighter swapping and over-the-top combos. The visuals still look a bit haggard, but the slick animations and solid controls do hold up. Unfortunately, the upgrades are purely aesthetic—the lack of online play is a massive missed opportunity.

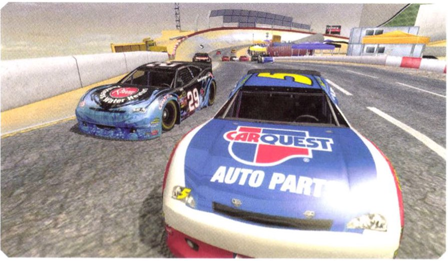
Also included is *Tekken: Blood Vengeance*, a feature-length CG movie, and *Tekken Tag Tournament 2: Prologue*, a bare-bones demo for next year's sequel. Hardcore Tekken fans will go nuts for *Vengeance's* enthralling, *Advent Children*-style action, but we were satisfied with a single screening. Prologue is a shred of a game, offering a mere four fighters and no multiplayer. This could've easily been an unlockable instead of a highly touted feature on the box.

Good fighting games never disappoint, and *Tekken Tag Tournament HD* will turn any group hangout into a raucous, nostalgia-infused slugfest of bewildered hollering and spirited smacktalk. But for a newcomer to the *Tekken* series, that money might be better spent buying *Tekken 6* for half of *Hybrid's* asking price. LUCAS SULLIVAN

PlayStation The Official Magazine **6**

Info

Format PS3
Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Namco Bandai
Price $39.99
ESRB Teen
It's like watching a school girl beat down a bear.



NASCAR Unleashed

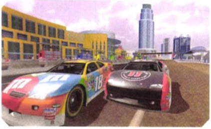
NAS-Kart

Remember *Daytona USA*? Sega's NASCAR-style racing game (sans the licensing agreement) blended arcade-style action with elements like drafting and drifting, creating a stock-car benchmark. Its 3D polygons even conveyed a real sense of speed. More importantly, it was fun. *NASCAR Unleashed* attempts to harken back to *Daytona USA*—only with the proper license and less "git-er-done"—but comes up short.

Unleashed is all about straightforward, fast-paced action, but the controls definitely dampen the fun. Under normal driving circumstances, the driving engine provides intuitive car control, but countersteer or hit any sort of bumps and the physics go out the window. Multiple inputs to the analog stick seem to go unnoticed and lord forbid we catch some air or the car starts flopping around like a leaf caught in a F2 scale tornado.

A dedicated Drift button is made available for traversing hairpin turns and earning points, but the aforementioned countersteering issue makes it difficult to control the action. All we could do was press the button, watch the skid marks ooze out of the rear tires, and hope we emerged from the drift safely. Worst case, we caught air (bad). Best case, we slammed into another car, earning boost (good).

Much of *Unleashed's* gameplay revolves around boost or the accumulation thereof. Slamming into an opponent builds the boost meter, as does drafting behind one. Repeated attacks will create a "rival" who will target us for retribution, but will also earn us boost. Completing random challenges that pop up during a race builds the boost meter quickly, but for instant boost, we simply have to drive through a pit stop for a full boost meter and replenished health—important when the check engine light pops up after one too many slams.



△ NASCAR racing: Making rubbing a cooperative sport.

Info

Format PS3 **Pub** Activision
Dev Firebrand Games
Price $39.99 **ESRB** Everyone
It's like a NASCAR-themed rollercoaster run off the rails.

Popular NASCAR drivers make appearances in the game, including Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson, and Dale Earnhardt, Jr., complete with matching car liveries. Sadly, only one simulated car was rendered to stand in for all the different models. The tracks, complete with dirt, trees, and sand, might be more rally car than NASCAR, but the dynamic environments keep things interesting.

Unleashed is geared mostly toward family play. It may not be a game for racing purists, but if you're looking to introduce stock car racing to a child, look no further. CARTER JUNG

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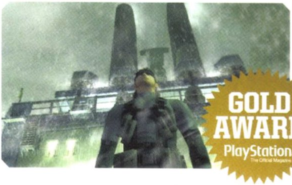
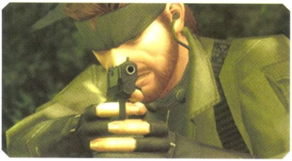


GOLD AWARD PlayStation The Official Magazine



Metal Gear Solid HD Collection

Solid gold gaming

Info

Format PS3
Pub Konami
Dev Kojima Prod./ Blue Point/KCEJ
Price $49.99
ESRB Mature
It's like not having to worry our nostalgia is misplaced.

Graphics age and controls grow outdated, but genius never fades. Need proof? Look no further than the *Metal Gear Solid HD Collection*, which packages together three of the finest gaming experiences ever created—*MGS2: Sons of Liberty*, *MGS3: Snake Eater*, and the previously PSP only *Peace Walker*—all revamped in bright shining HD.

Both *Sons of Liberty* and *Snake Eater* already looked amazing when they launched on PS2, so their new visual upgrades actually give them a fighting chance alongside today's next-gen graphics. Sure, they can't match the visual splendor of something like *Uncharted 3*, but the graphics also don't distract from the series' trademark sneaking gameplay, which remains as perfectly paced and cleverly constructed as ever.

Minor camera and control issues feel a bit jarring at first, but these issues aren't enough to diminish the gripping stories and addictive gameplay. And while *Peace Walker* actually benefits least from the HD makeover, it's blessed with dual-analog controls and deeper online support than its previous platform could ever hope to offer. SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

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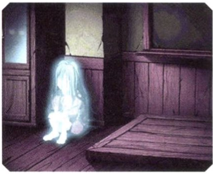
Figuring out how to progress the story often meant searching every cabinet and floorboard in the haunted Heavenly Host Elementary School.



If the game were a graphic novel, we would read it. Unfortunately...

Corpse Party

No need to RSVP

Info

Format PSP
Pub XSEED Games
Dev Team GrisGris
Price $19.99 (Download only)
ESRB Mature
It's like a ghost story about gamers who're forced to not have fun.

After five hours of *Corpse Party*, we had an epiphany—it's not so much a game as it is an interactive horror story. By "horror story" we of course mean the bizarre Japanese kind in which a group of high school students find themselves trapped in a haunted elementary school filled with hostile ghosts and mutilated corpses. By "interactive" we mean walking around said school, painstakingly searching for whatever key/floorboard/piece of random, non-descript junk is required to propel the story forward. There's no combat or actual game mechanics at work here—just lots and lots and lots of reading. And dying.

To paint a better picture of what it's like to play *Corpse Party*, imagine reading one of those "choose your own adventure" books; as we progress through the story, we make decisions that dictate the outcome. Except what if there was really only *one* correct path to take? What if, by choosing the wrong options in our adventure, we had to start reading the book all over again in hopes of guessing only the choices that progress the narrative? This is how *Corpse Party* works. We were occasionally presented with decisions and encounters that ended our journey without warning—and when our last save was buried beneath 35 minutes of text and 20 minutes of searching for a hidden item, we got pretty bored pretty quickly.

At least the story's interesting. The haunted school in which our playable group of friends find themselves trapped has a mysterious past, and the students must unravel its secrets while searching for an exit and trying to survive. It's all very gruesome. Dead bodies litter the hallways, and *Corpse Party* has no issue explaining in detail just how dead a person really is.

The creepy atmosphere is further enhanced by an unnerving musical score that builds a constant sense of dread—until we're killed *again* and have to read through mountains of text *again*. We became conflicted: we felt compelled to press on to see how everything turned out, but the forced game mechanics became so frustrating that we wanted to give up. We're always down for a good horror story, but having to slog through mundane tasks and potentially life-ending guessing games to reach the outcome sours the experience. As a creepy tale, *Corpse Party* is intriguing; as a game, it's abo—*game over, please try again.*

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RYAN TALJONICK

All Zombies Must Die!

Format **PSN** Pub **Konami** Dev **Doublesix** Price **$9.99** ESRB **Mature**

Though it's a sequel to 2009's *Burn Zombie Burn!*, this cartoony twin-stick shooter takes things to the next level (literally) by adding role-playing elements like fetch quests, weapons crafting, and having a to-do list that isn't just "shoot or punch that zombie." This makes the experience both more engaging and less repetitious. The only possible downside is that the right thumbstick is *only* for aiming, not for aiming and shooting a steady stream of bullets; we have to pull R2 repeatedly for that. While this may be a matter of personal preference, we found the added button-press a bit cumbersome. It was enough to turn the game from a must-play to a maybe-pass. PAUL SEMEL

PlayStation **7**

Skylanders Spyro's Adventure

Format **PS3** Pub **Activision** Dev **Toys for Bob** Price **$69.99 (Starter Pack)** ESRB **Everyone 10+**

An insidiously clever fusion of action figures and videogames, *Skylanders* lets us teleport our favorite *Spyro* characters into an action adventure via a Portal of Power peripheral. Once in the game, we face 3D platforming challenges and battle enemy minions and bosses. The catch here is that the more figurines we possess (available for an additional $8 a pop), the easier it is to prevail as we can tag team our characters as their health is depleted. Alternatively, defeated characters can re-enter the fray after a prolonged rest or by restarting the level. It's a formula sure to have kids wailing for more figures, but the game is enjoyable enough that adult gamers won't mind playing along. ROGER BURCHILL

PlayStation **8**

Cartoon Network
Punch Time Explosion XL

Format **PS3** Pub **Crave Entertainment** Dev **Papaya Studios** Price **$39.99** ESRB **Everyone**

An elite team of our favorite animated characters takes on evil in *Punch Time Explosion XL*. The multiplayer features several gratifying brawling modes, and the drop-in/drop-out campaign intersperses boss brawls with simple, enjoyable platforming action. We were fully prepared for a kids bargain game, but when Space Ghost's voice filtered through our headset and we saw Captain Planet and Johnny Bravo on the roster, we couldn't help but devolve back into our younger selves and relive the joys of Saturday morning cartoons. ANNE LEWIS

PlayStation **7**

DLC Roundup

SOCOM 4: U.S. Navy SEALs
Evac Co-op Pack

Price **$7.99** ESRB **Mature**

Two high-powered weapons give this expansion some heavy firepower, but what distinguishes this DLC is the new cooperative Evac multiplayer mode that has us battling through thick firefights to reach a lone rescue vehicle. Six new character skins are also included.

Dungeon Siege III
Treasures of The Sun

Price **$9.99** ESRB **Teen**

The harsh dangers of the Aranoi desert are calling. This DLC sends us beyond the borders of Ehb on a quest steeped in the lore of the realm. Aside from a more interesting plot and a fresh set of foes, an increased level cap, new abilities, and a new enchanting system bolster the hack-'n'-slash action.

Download of the Month

Deus Ex: Human Revolution
The Missing Link

Price **$14.99** ESRB **Mature**

Trapped on the cargo ship *Heng Sha* and temporarily stripped of his augmentations, Adam Jensen kicks off the Missing Link in some serious hot water. The ship's cramped corridors hide many dangers to puzzle through, and there's a lot of wiggle room for using different augmentations to creatively overcome the steep odds for survival.

Conan the Barbarian

He's still no Arnold

Info

CONAN
THE BARBARIAN

Price $39.99
Creators Marcus Nispel, Thomas Dean Donnelly, Joshua Oppenheimer, Sean Hood
Starring Jason Momoa, Stephen Lang, Rachel Nichols, Ron Perlman, Rose McGowan
Rated R
Extras Two commentary tracks; *Conan Legacy* and Robert E. Howard documentaries, making-of shorts.

It's inevitable that we compare the new *Conan* against the old, even though the movies are completely unrelated takes on the same literary character. Jason Momoa fits the barbarian's loincloth perfectly when it comes to the physical stuff, and the young actor certainly has enough practice playing this kind of role thanks to his time on *Stargate Atlantis* and HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

While HBO was able to get a convincing performance out of Momoa, director Marcus Nispel can't quite seem to do the same. Momoa is excellent when swinging his sword, but the pacing grinds to a halt every time he opens his mouth. His timing and delivery are awful, and the script doesn't give him much to work with. It's hard not to groan when Conan woodenly explains his life philosophy as "I live, I love, I slay. I am content."

As bizarre as it may sound, Schwarzenegger simply gave a better performance back in 1982. This modern version also doesn't take as many chances. There are a few great bits of over-violence and plenty of topless wenches, but there's little intensity in Conan's quest here. The entire film feels a bit contrived and lacks real soul. It may be rated R, but its PG-13 at heart.

Still, this is a barbarian movie, so high-value writing isn't exactly expected, and Conan is fun. Also, it looks fantastic. Filmed in 3D, this is a perfect example of everything good and bad about the technique. The actual 3D effects are nearly throwaway; there are a few cool uses, and it looks great with the extra depth, but the overall effect is secondary. What's truly impressive is the way the 3D technique affords every element in each shot to be perfectly in focus. A lot of effort was made in recreating Conan's world, with scoping vistas, creepy dungeons, ancient cities, and dangerous wastelands, and it's all sharp and crisp. On a technical level, *Conan the Barbarian* is terrific and a good sign of how future films will be made.

The two commentary tracks (including one from Momoa himself) add to the collectable value of the movie, along with some decent making-of featurettes. Even though *Conan the Barbarian* isn't likely to reach the cult status of the original, it's still fun.

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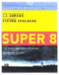
JASON D'APRILE

Super 8

E.T. for the new kids



Info

Price $44.99 **Creator** J.J. Abrams, Steven Spielberg **Starring** Joel Courtney, Riley Griffiths, Elle Fanning, Kyle Chandler **Rated** PG-13 **Extras** Deleted scenes, more.

Children of the '80s had *E.T.*, and, nearly 20 years later, it makes sense that a new generation should get their own version. *Super 8* is definitely that movie. Written and directed by J.J. Abrams and produced by Steven Spielberg, the movie focuses on a group of middle schoolers trying to make a low-budget horror flick, ending up in a very high-budget one instead.

When a massive train crash unleashes, well...something, the government swoops down on the kid's little middle-American town like a murder of angry crows. Paranoia ensues as dogs and humans begin to go missing at an alarming rate. For adults, it's hard not be cynical at all the clichés used here. In particular, the military is portrayed as single-minded thugs who will go to any measure to re-secure the...thing...that escaped their grasp.

The kids are resourceful little blokes who come of age under duress and find their inner courage, and the main character finds out that girls don't have cooties after all. His father, still traumatized over the death of his wife, is the local sheriff. He's gruff and disconnected from his son, yet still obviously caring. Indeed, there's no stereotype or cliché left unturned in *Super 8*.

Unlike most movies so mired down in formula, however, *Super 8* still works amazingly well. Abrams knows how to keep the pacing tight and the action exciting. The movie builds up slowly, but once it gets rolling, it moves along briskly. The other secret to its success is mysterious force that begins terrorizing the town following the train crash. The reveal of the military's secret is one of the most exciting parts of the film.

Director commentary is welcome here, as Abrams is always interesting to listen to, even if the extras aren't especially extravagant. Featurettes and a deconstruction of the train crash sequence still give fans plenty to peruse. JD

PlayStation The Official Magazine **7**

Blu-ray Roundup

Tucker & Dale vs. Evil

Price $29.98 **Rated** R

This fun twist on the evil-redneck genre stars two likeable guys who get mistaken for psycho hillbillies by a group of idiot college kids. When the kids start accidentally dying in horrible ways, hilarity ensues. While this isn't brilliant fare, the movie has plenty of laughs. **7**

Boardwalk Empire

Price $79.98 **Rated** NR

It's Steve Buscemi's brilliant performance that acts as the keystone to this superb HBO series, which is based on actual prohibition-era events in Atlantic City. The cast is terrific, the production values top-notch, and each of the 12 episodes is riveting. **9**

13

Price $29.99 **Rated** R

A remake of the French film *13 Tzameti* and done by the same director, *13* is a remarkably tense thriller. With a great cast that includes Mickey Rourke and Jason Statham, and a plot centered on an illegal Russian roulette gambling ring, the movie is harsh, nerve wracking, and riveting. **8**

Bonekickers

Price $39.99 **Rated** NR

Bonekickers is much like the U.S. show, *Bones*—if the anthropologists actually studied history instead of modern murders. While it suffers from some cheesy effects, the show boldly adresses modern issues. **7**

Want that

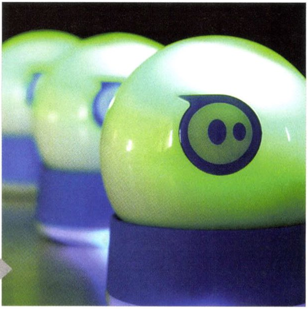
Lust-have stuff for PlayStation people

Topo Daypack

Topo's classically styled backpack uses 1000d Cordura for the exterior and coated pack cloth for an entirely lined inner compartment. The natural leather lash tabs are perfect for securing extra gear.

$98

topodesigns.com



Orbotix Sphero

This remote-controlled glowing sphere connects to an iPhone or Android device via Bluetooth. Sphero comes with downloadable games or sketch a path on the smartphone that Sphero will follow perfectly.

$130

gosphero.com

Tokyo Flash Kisai Seven LED Watch

This timepiece is clearly influenced by *Tron*. It uses two pulsating LED rings to show the time: the inner ring shows the hours and the outer ring the minutes in intervals of five.

$139

tokyoflash.com

Nest Thermostat

The Nest takes about a week to start picking up on our routine, at which point it begins to adjust home temperature accordingly. Built-in Wi-Fi means it can warm things up before we even arrive home.

$249

nest.com

Incase Sonic headphones

These gorgeous cans have a soft matte finish, clean lines, and subtle neon highlights. They're comfy, too; the ear cups and the headband's underside are made of memory foam and suede lined.

$199

goincase.com

Dyson Hot

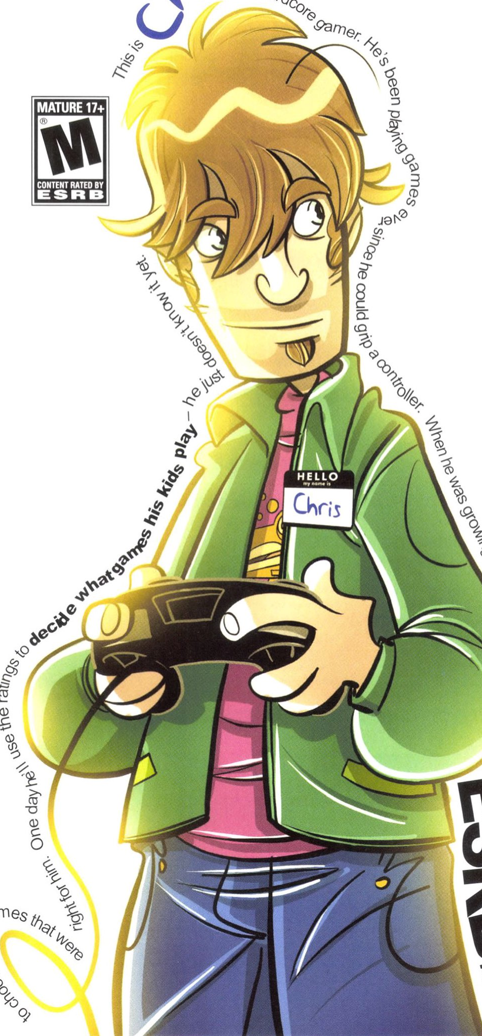
Dyson's fan-without-the-fan is reborn as a heater. By adding two ceramic heating elements to the original Air Multiplier fantastic airflow tech, the Hot can warm in the winter as well as cool in the summer.

$400

dyson.com

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

This is Chris, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB ratings** to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.



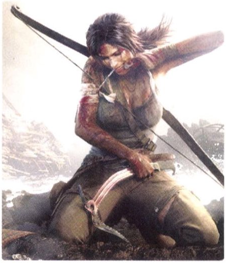
mail@ptom

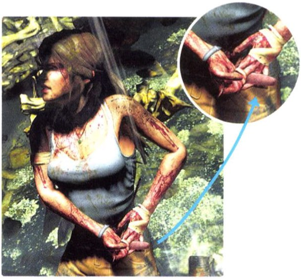
Zombies, eyes of the beholder, and sexy pictures—see what everyone's complaining about

Email us at **PTOM_letters@futureus.com** or write to PTOM, c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Ct. Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

PS3 | PSP | PS VITA
PlayStation
The Official Magazine
BREAKING VITA NEWS
REVIEWED Rage Dark Souls NBA 2K12 Child of Eden
ASSASSIN'S CREED REVELATIONS
The epic details revealed
PlayStation's Visionary Devs
UNCHARTED 3 PROTOTYPE SKYRIM SOULCALIBUR V

Did you guys notice Altaïr sneaking away just above Ezio's left shoulder? Awesome, right?





Phantom Phallus

I'm not sure if this is a joke, but your editors seemed not to notice a pornographic slip-up in your "10 Games That Dare to be Different" feature [Issue 51]. Number 10 on the list is the new Lara Croft *Tomb Raider*—it is obvious that she is not grasping her wound at her side but she is holding a phallus (I have checked with several others and we agree that it is indeed that). Perhaps it was a joke by one of your employees, but it is unprofessional. Please consider this feedback and how it might affect your business.

JADE THE INTERNET

Jade, we can 100 percent without a doubt guarantee that the item in question is, in fact, a belt. Seriously. Check out the evidence and then think long and hard about your assumption.

What's Our Cut?

Is the PS Vita going to have backwards compatibility with UMDs? I still very much enjoy playing classics like the *God of War* games, *Metal Gea Solid: Peace Walker*, and *Resistance: Retribution*. Is there any news on this yet, or have I missed something in one of your articles? P.S. If this gets into the magazine, my brother will pay me five bucks.

BEN STEPHANS THE INTERNET

Looks like your brother owes you five buck! Sony has hinted that UMD support for Vita is a possibility, but there has been no official confirmation. Just in case, maybe you should invest those five dollars in PSP maintenance so you can continue to play your UMDs?

Moody Blues

Do any developers remember the tense, moody, fear-inducing gameplay of the original *Resident Evil*? Hearing a zombie moan and not knowing where it's coming from? True, slow-paced survival-horror? Anyone? Zombies are meant to invoke fear, but this is lost when endless waves of zombies are thrown at us and the game turns into an action-adventure title. Why the hell can't the developers see that suspense is what makes a great zombie game?! Even the *Dead Space* developers understood this concept and that's not even a zombie game! Give all us zombie fans a true survival-*horror* game, not an action game that numbs our fear response by sending countless respawning zombies. **MARTIN** FAYETTEVILLE, NC

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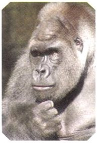
Also, Avoid Necromorphs

I'm joining the Air Force to become an engineer, and my girlfriend is currently in college for her medical degree. Based on Isaac and Nicole's relationship from *Dead Space*, should I be concerned?

JAMES THE INTERNET

Depends: Are either of you just a few days away from retirement? Are you a planning a romantic vacation, just the two of you, once "all this is over"? Are either of you "not even supposed to be here today"? That's usually when the bad stuff happens.



Going Ape

So who screens these letters anyway? I've written an awesome letter nearly every month and nothing ever gets published. Sometimes, people write something almost identical to mine with a weaker punch line, and theirs gets published. What gives? It better not be some crazed Gorilla doing the screening. If so, I've got something for him...

WFO:ASSASSIN SOCOM II

We asked our resident gorilla (who is not crazed, thank you very much) to send us all the emails we've received from your email account over the past three years, and do you know how many turned up? Three. Hopefully the "something" you've got is an explanation!

Fragile Alliance

Why is it that there are always articles in PTOM written by members of GamesRadar.com and articles on GamesRadar written by PTOM staffers? Are you guys BFFs or something?

ERIC THE INTERNET

We'd say we're more like frenemies.

Ask Scott

Q **Why are some of the free games I'm downloading with my PlayStation Plus account showing me expiration dates in the information tab on the XMB? If Sony's gonna give them to me for free after I pay for a subscription but then take them back a year later, that seems kind of ridiculous.**

IVAN ALVARADO BLOOMFIELD

A Unfortunately, Ivan, you'll lose access to all the free content you've obtained through your PS Plus account if you discontinue the service. Your best bet is to keep renewing your PS Plus subscription. Or start an Occupy PSN movement.

Want You to Want Me

I'm curious as to how the "Readers' Most Wanted" listing is developed. I have read your magazine from cover to cover for years, but I have not seen anything asking my opinion on my top twenty games, so I wonder how is it derived?

JAMES MULLINS THE INTERNET

Well, first, we attach a bunch of game names to a dartboard, we blindfold Roger...and then we consult with an independent survey company called Ipsos OTX MediaCT. They survey 1,000 U.S. gamers each week from a unique, custom-blended online community obtained and managed through multiple sources.

Forever Alone Backlash

After reading that one letter from a certain Sebastian who claims to be a 12-year-old and who wants you guys to put dirty pictures of women in your magazine so his parents would never suspect him [Mail, Issue 52], I have to ask: He was joking, right? Right? I hope so, 'cause it seems that you guys include enough racy pictures of videogame women as it is. For example, Paula from *Shadows of the Damned*—you shamelessly showed a picture of her in her underwear in your August issue a few months back. Or how 'bout those shameless cleavage shots of Catwoman or Harley Quinn or Catherine from the impressively titled *Catherine* game. My point is, PTOM doesn't need to add more racy pictures of woman, they need to show *fewer*. How about showing women like Elena Fisher, Faith from *Mirror's Edge*, Alyx Vance, and Lightning?

EDWARD THE INTERNET

We see your point, Edward, but you have to understand that readers like Sebastian are not joking. A large portion of our readers (and editors) are actually big fans of cleavage. For every email we get urging us to be more modest, we get five asking for shots of Lara's boobs. Sure we use the sexy imagery sent to us by developers, but we try not to go overboard with it and we do our best to express our admiration for gaming's positive female role models as well.

Et Cetera

All the other stuff that distracts PTOM

ACADEMY AWARD WINNER
THE SECRET IN THEIR EYES

The Secret in Their Eyes

"Okay, so it's won an Oscar for Best Foreign Film, but it took some late-night channel surfing before I discovered this deep, thoughtful Argentine crime thriller. The film's stars Ricardo Darín and Soledad Villamil offer captivating performances."

ROGER BURCHILL

My Drunk Kitchen

"Killing time on YouTube? Check out Hannah Hart's hilarious drunk cooking show in which very little actually gets cooked but everyone leaves entertained! Start with Episode 4. It's probably the best."

SCOTT BUTTERWORTH

THANKSKILLING

Thankskilling

"I have a bad habit of browsing bad movies on Netflix. That's how I stumbled across this terrible, terrible gem. Be warned, it's pretty graphic, but awfully awesome."

RYAN TALJONICK

SONS OF ANARCHY
CALIFORNIA

Sons of Anarchy

"I hopped onto the *Sons of Anarchy* train a bit late, but I am HOOKED. The story is gritty and compelling and I either love the characters or I love to hate them."

ANNE LEWIS

PSN
Best Games

It's the best of the best! Get the lowdown on this month's PSN goodies no one should live without.

BEST FULL GAMES

1

Creepy Crawly Platformer

Limbo

Limbo may have taken its time coming to PSN, but it was worth the wait. The game melds simple controls with supremely challenging gameplay and a beautiful, but chilling, aesthetic. It's the rare game where we die often but never feel frustrated about it.

10 Pub **Playdead**
Dev **Playdead**

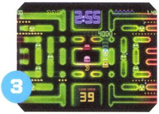
2

Tricks and Treats

Costume Quest

Sure, it's Halloween themed, but the adventure itself is timeless. With candy and monster-smiting in equal measure, this sugary delight is a charming homage to *Final Fantasy X-2*, enhanced by Tim Schafer's humor.

9 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

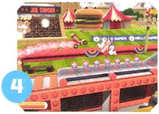

3

Retro Revival

Pac-Man Championship Ed.

There'll always be a place in our hearts for gaming's gluttonous yellow goober—but nostalgia be damned, this retro homage offers a whole new frenetic take on the classic gameplay.

9 Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Namco Bandai**


4

Platforming Puzzle Racer

Joe Danger

A mix of *ExciteBike*-style racing and insane stunt-driven platforming action, this vibrant indie gem shines brightly among the best PSN offerings available. Getting wild and dangerous has never been this awesome.

9 Pub **Hello Games**
Dev **Hello Games**

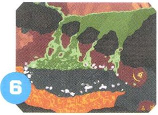
5

Zen Exploration

Flower

This gorgeous concept game makes blowing hordes of fluttering petals around a lush natural environment into an unforgettable experience that holds up against the biggest triple-A offerings. Don't pass this one up.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **thatgamecompany**


6

Puzzle Shooter

PixelJunk Shooter

Featuring alien and rock blasting galore, ihe fourth entry in the *PixelJunk* series is easily the best. Saving trapped mining colonists with a versatile, environmental puzzle-solving ship is a creative and challenging affair that taxes both our mind and our reflexes.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Q-Games**

7

Lettuce Defend Ourselves

Plants vs. Zombies

This ubiquitous tower defense game has made the platform rounds, but there's no denying its insidious charms and eternal goofiness. Hours will be spent meticulously maintaining the grid-like lawn in an attempt to fend off the rampaging waves of groaning, brain-chomping zombies.

9 Pub **SCEA**
Dev **PopCap Games**

8

Role-playing Puzzler

Might & Magic Clash of Heroes

Don't overlook *Heroes* with its throwback 2D visuals and turn-based battle system—the RPG-flavored puzzle action requires stacking creatures for attacks and building walls for defense. It may look and play old school, but it's still mighty fun and magically challenging.

9 Pub **Ubisoft**
Dev **Capybara Games**

9

Hardcore brawler

Street Fighter III Third Strike Online

This perfect port of the legendary 1997 arcade game features all new netcode that virtually eliminates lag. *Third Strike*'s deep, demanding mechanics have earned it a diehard following. It deserves to be rediscovered and celebrated.

9 Pub **Capcom**
Dev **Capcom/Iron Galaxy**

10

Dolled-Up Adventure

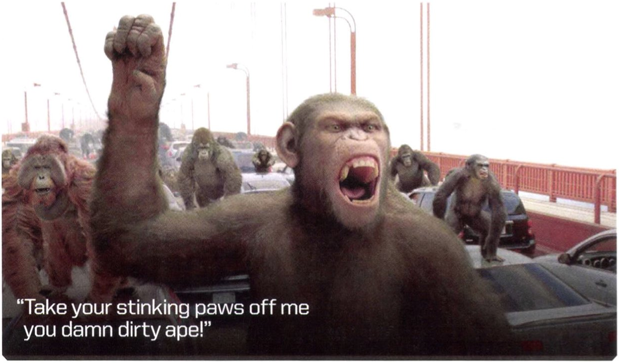
Stacking

Double Fine games come chock full of personality and charm. Using babushka dolls to solve puzzles and explore a '30s Depression-era-esque world of miniature mannequins may not seem all that compelling, but it is. This is a fine argument for Double Fine to make more PSN titles.

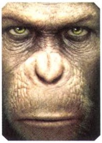
8 Pub **THQ**
Dev **Double Fine**

PSN Video Delivery Service Spotlight

What we're downloading to our PS3 this month



"Take your stinking paws off me you damn dirty ape!"



Rise of the Planet of the Apes

ETA **Dec 13** Rated **PG-13** Genre **Sci-fi/Action** Studio **20th Century Fox**

We've seen our fair share of "medicines" transform normal humans and animals into flesh eating zombies and hulking mutations. It's no surprise, then, that when a chimpanzee named Caesar consumes an experimental Alzheimer cure, he develops an impressive amount of intelligence and leads a revolt against mankind with an army of angry apes under his command. *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is an origin story to the 1968 original and is a perfect example of how experimental medications can have very apocalyptic results.

Top VDS Downloads

Movies

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows, Part 2
Cars 2
Crazy, Stupid, Love.
Captain America: The First Avenger
The Change-Up

TV Shows

The Walking Dead
South Park
Family Guy
Sons of Anarchy
It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia

BEST FREE STUFF

1

Fore On Fore

Worms Crazy Golf

Carnival course pack

Trading rocket launchers for nine irons is an odd direction for the Worms series, but there's no reason to pass on this crazy carnival-themed DLC. We approve of this wild and wooly 18-hole course expansion.

Pub **Team17 Software**
Dev **Rockpool Games**

2

Stealing Style

Payday: The Heist

wallpapers

Who doesn't want to be greeted by guns, dudes in freaky clown masks, and piles of money when they fire up their PS3? Not us, that's for sure. These wallpapers are loaded with mischievous style.

Pub **SOE**
Dev **Overkill Software**

3

Plane Membrane

Ace Combat

F-15C skin

What's that? Turn our awesome jet fighter into a doom-dealing skeletal nightmare complete with glowing eyes that shoot bullets? Yes, please! We feel the need, the need for this F-15C "Death Rider" skin.

Pub **Namco Bandai**
Dev **Project Aces**

4

Meat Your Maker

The Baconing

wallpaper

We can practically smell the delicious sizzle of cooked animal flesh emanating from this fiery homage to all that is DeathSpank. A thong-toting warrior and a wall of fire inspire us to dive into battle.

Pub **Hothead Games**
Dev **Hothead Games**

5

Speed Demons

MotorStorm Apocalypse

Halloween livery

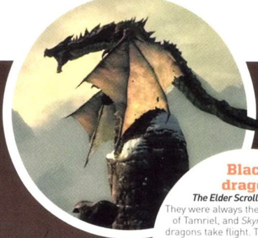
This spooky, free update lets us pimp out our ride and display our badassitude on the track with some eerie new designs.

Pub **SCEA**
Dev **Evolution Studios**

IN THE MOOD FOR...

Dragons

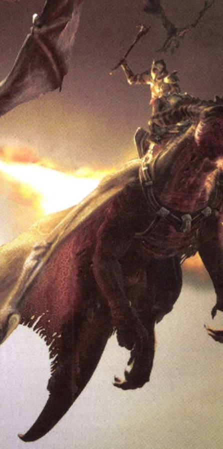
Latest Score: puny PlayStation humans nil, flaming, flying lizards five



Black dragon

The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim

They were always the greatest legend of Tamriel, and *Skyrim* finally sees dragons take flight. The black dragon is your common or garden-variety fire-breather, while there are also icy frost dragons. Not to mention Alduin—the dragon god boss behind the game's main plot. He's also known as the World Eater. So he's probably not a terribly nice guy, then.



Plains dragon

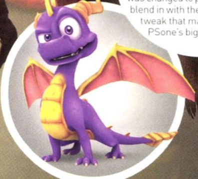
Lair

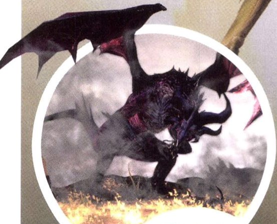
When a game's own producer describes its signature dragon as "middle of the road" and an "SUV with teeth", you know you're heading into troubled waters. Despite the fact that it let you take the flaming beasts into the sky and swat away entire armies like mere scraps of meat, this early PS3 title really did crash and burn.

Spyro

***Spyro the Dragon* series**

It's not technically a defining characteristic, but most dragons are massive. That makes Spyro the runt of the litter: a dinky, cocky runt. Originally he was green, but that was changed to purple so he didn't blend in with the grass. A simple tweak that made him one of PSone's biggest names.

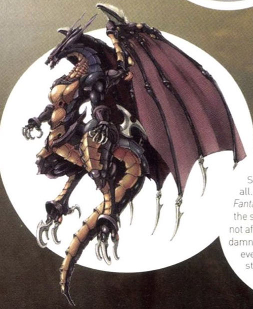




Flemeth

Dragon Age: Origins

Talk about surprises. Flemeth's a saucy crone when you meet her, but it later turns out she's a shape-shifter who kills her "daughters" to stay alive. Her next meal? Your companion Morrigan. Try to stop her and she turns into a High Dragon for one of the game's toughest boss fights. Turn a blind eye, though, and she'll leave you alone. Morri-who?



Bahamut

***Final Fantasy* series**

Sometimes a name says it all. Bahamut is known in *Final Fantasy* lore as "the conqueror of the skies." Even in a series that's not afraid of hyperbole, it's a pretty damn badass title to bear. In nearly every *FF* installment, he's the strongest creature you can summon to your aid in battle. Here, boy!

The Netherworld Special Election Begins!

DISGAEA 4

A Promise Unforgotten

Mega Evolved Graphics!

TOTAL DAMAGE 102947568

Superb Networking System!

Gigantic Weapons!?

Massive Monsters Appear!?

TOTAL DAMAGE 203

✱Screenshots are not from the final product.

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